Chasing in the Wild (University Series #3)

by 4reuminct

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Summary: University Series #3.

Sevi, the team captain of Growling Tigers, never expected to fall in love again after his first heartbreak with his bestfriend.. until he met Elyse, the spoiled cheerleader from La Salle.

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EPILOGUE

PROLOGUE

University Series #1: The Rain in EspaÃ±a (complete)

University Series #2: Safe Skies, Archer (complete)

University Series #3: Chasing in the Wild

This story contains spoilers for University Series #1 and #2.

DISCLAIMER: _This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places,

events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author’s

imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons,

living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental._

_This story is not affiliated with UST/ADMU/FEU/DLSU/other universities, UAAP

team, UST Growling Tigers, and DLSU’s Animo Squad._

Please be advised that this story contains mature themes and strong language

that are not suitable for very young audiences. Read at your own risk.

“I don’t like this. Come up with another plan.”

Binalik ko ang folder na isang beses ko lang binuklat ngunit hindi kaagad

nagustuhan ang bumungad na cover page. I sighed and massaged the bridge of my

nose.

“Go,” I dismissed the head of the marketing team.

Sumandal ako sa swiveling chair ko at pumikit saglit. Wala pa atang isang

minuto ay may kumatok na ulit sa opisina ko at nakita ko ang sekretarya kong

takot na naglalakad palapit, may dalang documents.

“Madam, kailangan daw po ng pirma niyo,” dahan-dahan niyang nilagay sa lamesa

ko ang documents.

Napabuntong-hininga ako ulit at umayos ng upo. My god! This job is stressing

me out! Kakabalik ko pa lang sa Pilipinas, ito na ang trabahong bumungad

sa’kin! Like what? Wala man lang bang pahinga? Walang welcome back party?

Walang anything like that?

Walang day in the spa? Well, at least I managed to change the color of my nail

polish yesterday. Dark red na siya ngayon with white crystals. It looked

pretty!

“Have you talked to the owner of Mademoiselle about the limited-edition bag

that I want?” I asked while signing the papers.

“M-madam, they want to personally see you. They don’t do delivers daw,”

kinakabahang sagot niya.

Mas lalong nag-init ang ulo ko. I’ve been waiting for that bag to arrive! 2

weeks na ‘kong naghihintay at malalaman ko ngayong hindi pala na-order?!

Goodness! Mamamatay ako nang maaga sa lugar na ‘to! Sa kumpanyang ‘to! Sa mga

tao sa paligid ko!

“Okay,” I said calmly. “Sa tingin ba nila ay may oras ako para bumisita? Ano

sila? They’re not even that important! Akala mo naman! Kung ayaw nila, e’di

huwag! Their loss, not mine!”

Patuloy lang akong nagrereklamo habang pumipirma. Hindi nagsalita ang

sekretarya ko at pilit lang na nakangiti sa’kin, kunwari nakikinig sa mga

pinagsasasabi ko.

“E, ‘yung in-order kong perfume sa France?” I asked again.

“Ah, wala pa pong stock, Madam,” she said nervously.

“Bakit wala pa?!” Inis na sabi ko at binagsak ang papel na tapos nang pirmahan

sa gilid. “I will talk to the owner!”

Napairap ulit ako at binasa ang ibang dokumento sabay pirma. Kapag hindi ko

nagugustuhan ang nakalagay ay tinatabi ko muna at itatanong mamaya.

“May meeting po pala mamaya, Madam. Dadating ang representatives ng Valeria

Group Construction,” she reminded me.

“The what?” Kumunot ang noo ko, walang kaalam-alam kung bakit sila pupunta

rito.

“Ah, bago pa po kayo dumating, mayroon pong project ang company with VGC para

sa itatayong bagong resort po,” she explained.

“Where are the files?” My brows furrowed. “Bakit walang nagbibigay sa’kin ng

background information?!”

“Kukunin ko po!”

Valeria Group.

Familiar, huh. Familiar surname din. I smiled sarcastically.

Bumalik nga ang secretary ko at binigyan ako ng files. Binasa ko ‘yun isa-isa,

naghahanda para sa meeting mamaya. My mouth formed an ‘o’ when I saw their

past projects like the buildings, hotels, condominiums, houses, etc. The designs were impressive, and the construction looked firm and safe.

My eyes widened when I saw a familiar name on the list.

“What?!” I exclaimed in disbelief.

Binasa ko ulit. Binasa ko nang maraming beses para pumasok sa utak ko. Tama ba ang nababasa ko? O namamalik-mata lang ako?

Engr. Sebastian Vincent Camero.

Head engineer.

The what?!

The head of the what?! Construction?!

“What the actual fuck of fuck is fucking happening,” I whispered to myself, eyes wide.

Am I gonna see him later? Pupunta ba siya sa meeting?! Wait, of course he will! He’s the head engineer of the project! Right? Dapat naroon siya!

“Oh my god,” I exclaimed.

Nagmamadali akong tumayo at binuksan ang maliit kong cabinet so I can find something else to wear. I looked at myself again in the mirror. I was lazy earlier this morning so I just wore a pencil skirt and a yellow top!

Goodness! Hindi ako na-inform na makikita ko siya! What should I wear?!

Kinuha ko ang naka-hanger na maroon off-shoulder jumpsuit at dali-daling

pumasok sa C.R. para magpalit ng damit. I had a hard time putting it on kaya

haggard na ‘ko paglabas. I retouched my make-up and also fixed my hair na

naka-soft curls. At least I had time to prepare right?!

Pumili pa ‘ko sa dalawang box kung anong necklace ang susuotin. I went with

the simple one with diamonds on it. Pagkatapos, kinuha ko ang make-up kit ko

at nag-retouch.

“Alice!” I called my secretary.

“Madam!” Nagmamadali siyang pumasok.

“Anong mas bagay na lipstick?” Tinaas ko ang dalawang shade ng lipstick para

papiliin siya.

“Wow!” She wowed at my ‘change of outfit’. “Wala po akong masyadong alam sa

lipstick, Ma’am, pero ‘yung kaliwa na lang.”

“Ang pangit. Gusto ko ‘yung kanan.”

“Uhm.. Okay po.”

I gestured her to go back to her desk while I was putting on my red matte

lipstick. I plumped my lips and sprayed my perfume before Alice entered again

to remind me about the meeting.

“Yes, coming!” Nagmamadali kong kinuha ang bag kong hindi pa terno sa suot ko!

It was yellow! “My god! No!”

Nilabas ko ang mga gamit ko at naghanap ng maliit na purse para roon na lang

ilagay kaysa naka-red ako at yellow ang bag ko. Wala naman kasi sa plano ko

ang magpalit ng damit but.. you know.. He’s coming!

“Madam, 5 minutes na po kayong late,” Alice entered my office again.

Tumango ako habang inaayos ang gamit ko, hindi na napansin ang pag-pasok ni

Austin, ang Managing Director namin.

“Elyse,” he called.

“What?! Eto na! Nag-aayos lang ng gamit! Susunod na ‘ko!” Nagmamadaling sagot

ko.

“Yeah, right,” bumuntong-hininga siya at naglakad na muli palabas ng opisina

ko.

I checked my face again through the mirror before getting my purse. Taas-noo

akong naglakad sa hallway papunta sa board room. Good thing my office was in

the same floor as the board room, kundi maha-haggard ang itsura ko at

kakailanganing mag-retouch ulit.

When I entered the room, the people inside immediately stood up to pay respect

to the CEO, which was me.

I did not smile. Tuloy-tuloy lang akong naglakad sa pinakaharap, kung saan

nakapwesto ang upuan ko. Everyone was quiet and some were nervous. No one

dared to talk when I entered the room. Para silang pinutulan ng dila nang

pumasok ako sa kwarto. Nang maupo, nilibot ko kaagad ang paningin ko at

tinignan isa-isa ang mukha ng mga nakaupo paikot sa mesa.

Kumunot ang noo ko nang hindi siya makita.

“Are we missing someone?” I asked the one in-charge of the attendance.

“Oh, Ma’am, Engineer Camero cancelled 2 hours ago.”

Ano?!

Agad nag-init ang ulo ko!

“For what reason?” I tried my best to remain calm.

“According to his e-mail, nagpatawag daw po ng meeting ang company nila so

hindi po siya makakarating, but he sent another engineer, Engineer Lavin, who

will replace him just for today.”

What the fuck?!

I changed my outfit, retouched my make-up, changed my bag, fixed my hair for..

for this?! Talagang kumulo ang dugo ko! Sinadya niya ba ‘to?! Para akong

babaeng hindi sinipot sa dinner!

I smiled sarcastically and played with the pen on my hand. Sa tingin ko,

mapuputol ko na ang ballpen na hawak ko dahil sa inis, ngunit naalalang mahal

ang ballpen ko kaya binitawan ko na lang ‘yon at nilagay sa mesa.

“Tell him to come here or else I will cancel this project,” I crossed my arms.

“M-Ma’am!” Gulat na sabi niya. “That’s not possible!”

“Can someone call Engineer Camero and tell him to attend this very important

meeting? I believe this was already scheduled prior to his appointment,”

kalmadong sabi ko.

Agad kinuha ng mga taga-Valeria company ang cellphone nila at nag-paunahang

tawagan ang pinakamamahal nilang head. I looked at my nails while waiting.

Bagong manicure pa naman ako tapos iinisin niya lang ako!

“Ma’am, Engineer Camero said he will be late for 40 minutes, but he will

attend. According to him, ‘start the meeting without me’,” a woman said.

I rolled my eyes and gestured them to start with the agenda. I listened carefully to what was being presented in front, and saved my questions for later para sa engineer itanong. Napangisi ako, iniisip pa lang ang mangyayari mamaya. Saktong-sakto, kakatapos lang ng presenter, bumukas ang pinto.

All of us looked at Engineer Camero who was holding two folders in hand. He was wearing a dark blue button-down dress shirt with three buttons opened and black slacks. He glanced at the projector screen before his gaze turned to me.

Tumaas ang kilay ko at tinignan siya pabalik.

“You’re late, Engineer Camero,” I stated the obvious.

Everyone looked at him but his eyes remained on me. He pursed his lips in annoyance before answering.

“My apologies, Miss Ledezma,” he said formally but sarcastically.

The side of my lips rose up and gestured the next presenter to prepare for his turn. Sevi, or Engineer Camero, who was now seated on the right side of the table, sighed and shook his head while reading the folder in front of him.

“Miss Ledezma? May I start?” The woman asked politely.

“Yes, you may,” I nodded, not taking off the smirk on my face.

I wondered if someone from the table knew that Engineer Camero and I were

together for five whole years.

But not anymore.

01

“Happy legality, Eli!”

I smiled awkwardly while the whole cheer dance squad was singing me a birthday

song. Umiinom ako ng tubig habang hinihintay silang matapos, pawis na pawis pa

sa suot na dolphin shorts at white shirt. Gabing-gabi na nang matapos kaming

mag-training for the upcoming UAAP Cheerdance Competition. More extensive na

ang training namin kasi malapit na!

“Thank you, guys,” I smiled when they finished singing. “Attend my debut party

this weekend, okay? Coach, sorry, absent that day,” I smiled cutely.

“Hay nako, Ledezma,” our coached chuckled.

“Anyway, here na ‘yung sundo ko so I need to go na! Bye guys!” Bumeso ako sa

kanila bago kinuha ang duffel bag ko at nagmamadaling umalis.

It was already around 11 PM and my driver was not around tonight so my half-

brother, Shan, had to pick me up. Mainipin pa naman ‘yun! Pagkapasok ko sa

kotse ay nakasimangot na nga siya at nagce-cellphone.

“Hi!” I smiled and wore my seatbelt. “Let’s go na, Kuya!”

“Ang tagal mo. I missed a date,” my brother shook his head and showed me his

Bumble profile.

“Wow, you still have so much time to date when you’re already in law school,

huh!”

Tumawa lang siya at nag-drive paalis. I was on my phone the whole time,

checking some online shops. I want to buy a new bag or new shoes, or maybe a

new case for my laptop? Tumingin ako sa taas, nag-iisip ng gustong bilhin.

Birthday ko naman today, e!

“1 hour before your day ends. I’ll treat you dinner,” suggest niya.

“Really?!” I clasped my hand together and looked at him with my puppy eyes.

Excited akong nag-search ng ‘Most expensive restaurant in Metro Manila’. Duh!

This is my chance, okay?! This is a one-time thing kaya dapat sulitin ko na! I

hope restaurants are still open at this hour!

“Ugh! Bakit close lahat?!” Reklamo ko habang nag-iiscroll at nakikita ang

closing hours.

“You know what’s open at this hour?” He raised a brow.

“What?”

“McDo. 24/7.”

“Nakakainis ka naman, e!” Hindi ako nag-tagumpay sa plans ko! Sigurado akong

pinag-isipan na niya lahat ng ito bago pa ‘ko alukin ng libre! He knows

limited restaurants lang ang open ng 11 PM! Coffee shops and fastfood chains

lang mostly. I wanted to eat steak pa naman!

We really ended up eating at McDo. Nakasimangot ako habang sinasabi ang order

ko. I wanted Kuya Shan’s wallet to suffer but I had no choice. Nag-drive thru

na lang kami so we can go home early. If not, magagalit si Daddy sa kanya.

Though naka-bukod siya right now kasi may condo siya malapit sa law school ng

La Salle. Mahihirapan siya kung magpapabalik-balik siya mula roon hanggang sa

bahay. And also, I think he hates Dad. Our dad.

“I’m home!” I announced when I entered the mansion. “Ah! Jewel!”

Lumuhod ako at sinalubong ang chihuahua kong naka-suot ng damit. Binuhat ko

kaagad siya at niyakap. Tumingin ako sa paligid at nagtataka kung bakit wala

sila Mommy. Helpers lang ang nakita ko.

“Mommy? Daddy?” I asked. Lumingon ako kay Kuya na nakatayo malapit sa pinto at

hindi pa umaalis.

“Happy birthday to you..”

Kumunot ang noo ko at tumingin kay Mommy na nakahawak sa cake at dahan-dahang

naglalakad palapit para hindi mawala ang apoy sa kandila. Daddy was behind

him, smiling.

“Mommy!” I pouted when she started singing more.

“Happy birthday sweetheart,” Dad gave me a soft kiss on the side of my head.

“Make a wish!” Tuwang-tuwa si Mommy at nilahad sa’kin ang cake.

Sumandal si Kuya sa may pader at pinanood lang kami nila Mommy. Napalingon sa

kanya si Mommy nang makitang hindi siya lumalapit sa amin.

“Shan! Come here!” My mom said sweetly. “Stay here for the meantime! Elyse

will open gifts!”

“I need to go, Tita,” Kuya just gave her a small smile. “Thank you, though.”

Kumaway siya sa’kin bago umalis. Napanguso ako at nagkatinginan kami ni Mommy.

Daddy pursed his lips and changed the topic. Pumikit na lang ako at nag-wish

about many things. Wala namang rule na dapat isa lang ang wish ko! Tutal,

maraming candles! More candles, more wishes!

“Where are the gifts?” I was so excited!

My mom led me to the living room and pointed at three designer paper bags. My

eyes sparkled when I saw my favorite brands. Kinuha ko kaagad ang

pinakamalaking paper bag at binuksan ang black box doon.

“Omg! I wanted this, Mommy!” Halos maiyak na ‘ko nang makita ang pair of shoes

na gusto ko last month when we went to New York.

“This one’s from your dad,” nilagay niya sa harapan ko ang isa pang paper bag.

“Oh my god, Dad! Thank you!” I hugged him tight when I saw the white hand bag

inside. It was so pretty! Simple but elegant! Bagay lang sa’kin!

I collect bags more than shoes, pero pwede na rin naman. The other paper bag

was just clothes. Iyon ang tinitignan ko kanina sa online shop! Narito na

kaagad sila sa harapan ko! I was so happy that night, halos hindi na nga

makatulog kaka-reply sa mga nagmemessage sa’kin ng happy birthday.

The next morning, I woke up early to prepare for my debut party later. My

family spent months to prepare for this big event! I was so excited because

finally, mararamdaman ko nang legal age na ‘ko! But I was also scared of a lot

of things like.. prison! I don’t want to go to prison!

“Ang ganda ng bag! I also wanted to buy like, this design!” Binagsak ni Fraida

ang sarili sa kama ko. She was my bestfriend since high school and we were

blockmates.

Nakaupo ako ngayon sa harap ng vanity table ko, pinapatuyo ang buhok habang

wala pa ang magme-makeup sa’kin.

“Since 18 ka na, maybe you can now get a boyfriend?!” Tuwang-tuwa si Ida na

umayos ng upo.

“‘Yung gusto kong boyfriend, lumipad na sa Florida!” I pouted and rolled my

eyes.

“Oh come on, Elyse! Kuya Hiro was probably just a crush! Find someone suitable

for you, since hindi ka naman papatulan noon ever because he’s your brother’s

friend! That’s not allowed!” Tumawa ulit siya.

“Wala pa ‘kong nagugustuhang iba,” I pouted again.

Nang dumating na ang mag-aayos sa’kin, naging abala na ako, pati ang bibig

nitong si Fraida, trying to keep me entertained para hindi ako ma-bore during

the makeup process. Hanggang ibaba ng dibdib ang buhok kong inayos ng stylist

into a messy but elegant bun. I had little bangs na inayos niya rin. I wore

grey contact lens after.

“You’re so pretty!” Puri ng stylist ko sa’kin nang i-harap ako sa salamin.

“Wala ka pa talagang jowa?”

“No, I’m still young,” I denied.

My dad was strict with having boyfriends, and also strict din si Kuya dahil

nga minor pa ‘ko, but now that I’m already 18, baka pwede na! I was so excited

to explore a lot of things. Marami akong gustong malaman. I wanted to feed my

curiosity!

I looked at myself in the mirror. My face was in the perfect size and shape.

The noseline made my nose even more pointed, my eyes reflected an innocent

angel, my cheekbones were a bit high, soft lips and perfect brows. My skin was

smooth and soft, a little lighter than my brother’s dahil magkaiba ang nanay

namin.

Champagne-colored ang gown ko with crystals all over it. It was an off-

shoulder gown. I had to wear heels because of my height. I think I was around

5‘4? Ida was actually taller than me by one inch.

The party will start at 6 PM so we went there around 4:30 PM so we can have a

little photoshoot inside my hotel room. Ida was wearing a white satin dress

and her hair was in soft curls. We took pictures together, too, as

bestfriends.

“Hey,” napatingin ako kay Kuya na kakapasok lang ng hotel room ko.

“Kuya!” I covered my mouth in awe when I saw him holding a bouquet of tulips.

He was wearing an ash-grey suit. He looked so formal and tall. Mukha siyang

matino ngayon at hindi mukhang playboy. Tumingin siya sa paligid bago naglakad

palapit sa’kin at marahang hinalikan ang tuktok ng ulo ko bago inabot sa’kin

ang bulaklak. Tuwang-tuwa kong inamoy ‘yon bago nilapag sa may table.

“Where are they?” Tanong niya nang mapansing wala sila Mommy sa loob. Ang

stylist, si Ida, at iba pang staff ang nandito sa loob.

“Oh, they’re greeting the visitors at the venue,” I explained.

“Hiro wanted to say happy birthday. Hindi siya makaka-attend,” he informed me.

I pouted and roll my eyes. Nakakainis naman na hindi niya naabutan ang debut

ko! Pero okay lang dahil kailangan naman talaga niyang umalis.. nakakalungkot

pa rin, though!

“Elyse, anak, tara na, they’re already starting,” my mom entered the room.

Tumayo ako at inalalayan ako nila Fraida pababa sa malaking venue sa isang

five-star hotel in Manila.

“Goodluck!” Fraida gave me a kiss on the cheek before entering the venue,

leaving me outside for my entrance.

When I was introduced, all of my visitors stood up and clapped. Dahan-dahan

akong naglakad sa red carpet, nakangiti at nakahawak sa braso ni Kuya para

maalalayan niya ‘ko. I saw so many faces! Ang mga matatanda ay halos hindi ko

kilala dahil either friends ni Mommy or friends ni Daddy, or business

partners. I saw my friends, blockmates, teammates, some socialites, and some

UAAP players. Halo-halo ang lahat. I was so glad they came!

“Larkin Sanchez,” the emcee called for the 18 roses.

Everyone looked around, trying to find the famous and great Arkin, just an

actor I know. I heard some whispers from the crowd. Napakunot ang noo ko at

tumingin din sa paligid, sinusubukan siyang hanapin. Saan ba nagpunta ‘yon?!

How dare he ruin my party?!

Kumunot ang noo ko nang may lalaking naglakad palapit, mukhang napilitan lang.

He was holding a rose, nakasimangot. Some were shocked because the man wasn’t

Arkin. It was.. someone I don’t even know! What the fuck!

Binigay niya sa’kin ang rose at kinuha ko ‘yon. I went with the flow and acted

normal para hindi masira ang party. He awkwardly placed his hand on my waist

and I put my hands on his shoulders.

“Who the fuck are you,” I whispered at him.

“Nasa restroom si Kino,” simpleng sabi niya.

Tumingin ako sa paligid when UAAP players started cheering and laughing. My

cheering squad clapped too. Napakunot ang noo ko at binalik ang tingin sa

kanya.

“Go Camero!” One of the basketball players cheered.

The guy in front of me smiled and gave him a salute playfully. Hinigpitan ko

ang hawak ko sa balikat ng lalaking nasa harapan ko para bumaon ang kuko ko sa

balikat niya. Sino ba siya?! Bakit ba sinasayaw niya ‘ko?! Ang tangkad niya pa

kaya medyo nakatingala ako!

“Go, you prick,” I glared at him when the emcee announced the next guy in

line.

“Okay, chill. Galit na galit,” he chuckled and walked away.

Sinundan ko siya ng tingin habang sinasayaw ako ng kaibigan ko. Nakita ko

siyang bumalik sa inuupuan niya at malakas na binatukan si Arkin na kakabalik

lang galing sa restroom. Tumatawa ito ngayon at nang-aasar habang ang lalaki

kanina ay mukhang badtrip. I saw him raise a middle finger, too.

What a shameful act! Middle finger, really?! Who invited that.. disrespectful

man in my party?!

After the 18 roses, we had 18 gifts, and then it was already dinner time so I

changed my outfit into a white cocktail tube dress. I roamed around per table

to greet some visitors, including my dad’s business partners. My brother was

with his friends. Sila Ericka, Helen, Neil, Arman, and others. Kulang dahil

wala si Hiro.

“Ah, Elyse, this is Selene, my secretary,” pagpapakilala ni Daddy sa babaeng

sunod na lumapit pagkatapos noong lalaking kabilang sa board.

“Hello-” Napatigil ako nang makita ang lalaki sa likuran niya. Sumimangot

kaagad ako nang makita ‘yung lalaki kanina!

He was wearing a black suit, perfect for his fit. He looked like someone who’s

always at the gym with his broad shoulders, and perfect arms. Nakabukas ang

coat niya kaya napansin ko ang panloob na kulay grey. Nakabukas ang tatlong

butones noon, revealing his chest a little and the silver necklace he had.

Hindi na talaga siya nag-abala pang maglagay ng necktie.

Tinaasan ko siya ng kilay nang magtama ang tingin namin. He also raised his

brow on me, mocking. He looked annoying, but I must admit that he looked good.

Perfect nose and jaw, skin a little darker than mine, thick brows, welcoming

eyes, and.. oh, dimples.

Hindi naman ganoon kalalim at napapansin lang tuwing nakangiti siya. Mukha

naman siyang pala-ngiting tao.

“Sevi, batiin mo ang anak ni Sir Ledezma,” siniko siya ng Mama niya.

“Binabati kita,” barumbadong sabi niya sa’kin.

I immediately glared at him.

“Thanks,” I sarcastically replied.

“Kumusta ang studies, Sevi? Graduating na, ah!” My dad commented, holding a

champagne glass.

“Oo nga po, e,” the guy smiled and scratched his head a little. “Hindi ko

binabati, Sir. Baka hindi matuloy, e.”

Umalis na ‘ko kaagad doon para puntahan ang teammates ko sa isang table. They

attended my party! Halos lahat sila ay mas matanda sa’kin pero mayroon namang

mga ka-edad ko lang. Kasama nila sa table ang ibang players namin.

We took some pictures before I sat down to strike a conversation. I was

enjoying their company until Wayne, one of our basketball players, stood up

and called someone.

“Camero!” He waved his hand.

“What the hell, stop calling that stranger!” Hinatak ko kaagad ang coat niya

upang maupo siya ulit pero hindi siya nagpatinag.

“Stranger!” Tumawa si Ate Raya.

“Bakit? Do you know him?” I curiously asked.

“Bebe, he’s the captain of UST Growling Tigers! Their basketball team? Don’t

you remember him? Natalo tayo sa kanila last season!” She laughed.

“Yeah, Eli, he’s hot. How could you forget about him?” Ate Dianne added, then

they laughed together.

Umayos lang sila nang lumapit ang lalaki at nakipag-apir kay Wayne. They were

talking about something, probably basketball. Nanatili ang masamang tingin ko

sa lalaki, trying to figure him out. There was this aura about him that I did

not like!

Dahil nakatingin ako sa kanya nang masama, napatingin din siya sa’kin at

nawala saglit ang ngiti sa labi. Napuno ng pagtataka ang mata niya at kumunot

bahagya ang noo bago binalik kay Wayne ang tingin. Siningkitan ko siya ng mata

at tinitigan siya hanggang sa mailang siya.

“Elyse, happy birthday! Sorry about what happened earlier!” Lumapit si Arkin

at bineso ako sa pisngi.

Some women were staring at him, starstruck. Napailing na lang ako. Nakaka-

starstruck naman talagang makakita ng sikat na artista sa harapan mo, right?

Well, as for me, I see them often so it wasn’t a big deal anymore.

“Sabi ko kay Sevi, kapag wala ako at hindi umabot sa turn ko, siya na ang

pumunta sa harapan. Sorry,” Arkin laughed. “Oh, have you guys met already?”

“Yeah,” umirap ako, hindi nagugustuhan ‘yon.

“Sevi,” tawag niya sa kaibigan niya.

Lumingon sa kanya ‘yung lalaki at nagpaalam saglit kay Wayne para lumapit sa

pwesto namin. Nakaupo ako at si Arkin nasa harapan ko. Umakbay siya sa

kaibigan niya pagkalapit nito. The man looked confused now.

“Elyse, this is Sevi, bestfriend ko,” pagpapakilala niya.

“Yeah, I don’t care,” sabi ko, hindi nakatingin.

“Attitude siya, pre,” tumawa ‘yung Sevi.

“Hayaan mo na, ganyan talaga kapag nagdadalaga na,” Arkin joked.

“Iba na talaga ugali ng kabataan ngayon,” napailing ‘yung Sevi at nag-tawanan

sila.

Agad akong tumayo at humarap sa kanila, masama ang tingin sa lalaki. I crossed

my arms and raised a brow at him, obviously making him feel that I dislike his

presence. He looked at me casually, not even intimidated by my stare. Instead,

he gave me a smile.

“Excuse me, I’m not ‘kabataan’ anymore,” malditang sabi ko.

His eyes were immediately filled with amusement. Tumaas ang dalawang kilay

niya at napakagat sa ibabang labi, pinipigilan ang ngiti.

“I’m not kabataan anymore,” he mocked and chuckled.

“Inaasar mo ba ‘ko?!” Humakbang ako palapit sa kanya at taas-noong hinarap

siya.

Arkin stepped aside, hindi man lang nang-aawat kahit mukhang mag-susuntukan na

kami rito ng kaibigan niya. Sevi smiled wider, enjoying the moment.

“Hindi, ah. Bakit naman kita aasarin? Smile ka na. Birthday mo ngayon, oh,”

the smile did not leave his face when he said that.

“Kahapon ang birthday ko, hindi ngayon,” masungit na sagot ko.

“O, e’di happy birthday!” He made a peace sign with both of his hands.

Umirap lang ako at tinalikuran na sila para maglakad sa susunod na table.

Pinalagpas at sinubukan ko na lang kalimutan ang inis ko sa lalaking ‘yon

hanggang sa makabalik na ‘ko sa harapan. Pagkatapos ng 18 wishes at 18 shots,

nag-message na ‘ko para sa mga dumalo.

I thanked everyone for attending my party before it officially ended. For the

after-party, I invited the people I know to the rooftop bar. Reserved na ‘yun

para sa’kin, pati ang pool. I went back to the hotel room again to change my

outfit.

“You did good, babe!” Ida gave me a thumbs up.

“Nabadtrip nga lang ako roon sa friend ni Arkin. Nakakaasar!” Reklamo ko

habang nagtatanggal ng earrings.

“Huh? Sino? ‘Yung pumalit ba sa kanya sa roses? In fairness, ang gwapo noon,

ah! Anong name?” Curious na tanong niya, mukhang type niya pa.

“Sevi,” sagot ko.

Nag-suot na lang ako ng dark red satin dress and let my hair down on soft

curls. My parents entered the room to deliver all the gifts. Ngumiti ako at

nag-pasalamat sa kanilang dalawa. They will sleep in the hotel room next to

mine, so they could give me privacy.

“Hindi ba siya ‘yung captain ng basketball team?” Tanong ni Fraida at pinakita

sa’kin ang sinearch niya sa google. “Look! Siya ‘yan, diba?”

“Oo raw. I don’t care. Why are we talking about him?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

“5th year, civil engineering, UST,” pagbabasa niya.

So he was 3 years older than me? Or 4? Ka-age niya siguro si Kuya.

“Tara na nga,” I changed the topic.

Umakyat kami sa rooftop bar. Naroon na ang mga kaibigan ko at sinalubong ako

ng birthday shots daw.

“She doesn’t drink!” Agap ni Fraida. “Don’t give her too much!”

It was true. Hindi ako umiinom ng hard drinks. I drank wine or champagne

during gatherings pero ang mga hard drinks like tequila, rum, nakikita ko lang

‘yun kila Kuya. I never tasted any of them because they never let me!

“It’s okay! I’m 18 now!” Sabi ko kay Fraida.

Everyone cheered when they did 5 seconds of pouring three different bottles on

my mouth. Fuck, they tasted bad! Why do people like drinking alcohol?! It

tasted so fucking bad, muntik ko nang isuka ‘yon!

“Here! Lemon!” Inabutan ako ni Ida ng lemon nang makita ang itsura ko.

“Ano ‘yan?! It tastes like.. medicine! Ang init pa sa lalamunan! Bakit ang

init?!” Reklamo ko kay Ate Ericka.

“This one’s Bacardi and that one’s tequila kaya mainit. Don’t worry, you’re

fine,” tinapik niya ang balikat ko. “Sorry, Shan! Debut niya!”

“Yeah,” my brother sighed.

Some people were dancing already and some were in the pool, having fun.

Naramdaman ko na ang hilo sa ulo ko nang pinainom nila ‘ko ng tatlo pang baso.

Pagkatayo ko, muntik na ‘kong matumba!

“Oh,” may humawak sa braso ko para hindi ako masubsob sa sahig.

“Ikaw nanaman!” Tinanggal ko ang hawak niya sa braso ko at humarap sa kanya

para ituro siya.

“Sorry, hindi ako kumakausap ng lasing,” Sevi chuckled and turned his back

against me.

Inis ko siyang sinugod para pigilan maglakad paalis dahil magtutuos kami!

Humawak ako sa coat niya at hahatakin na sana nang madulas bigla sa tabi ng

pool kaya nasama ko siya.

“Putangina!”

Umahon kaagad ako sa pool at nagsi-layuan ang mga tao roon nang bumagsak kami

para hindi masaktan. Oh my god! Niyakap ko kaagad ang sarili ko sa sobrang

lamig ng hangin. Umahon din si Sevi sa harapan ko, basang-basa ang buhok at

ang damit.

Agad siyang umahon at umupo roon sa gilid, tinatanggal ang coat niya. Fraida

immediately ran towards me, holding a towel. Tinulungan niya ‘kong umangat

mula sa pool.

“Oh my god, my makeup!” Sabi ko kaagad.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Hindi kumalat ang mascara.. Uhm, maybe a little bit.

I’ll fix it,” Ida tried to fix it.

Lumingon ako sa gawi ni Sevi na tinatawanan na ni Arkin. He pushed his wet

hair back before his hands fumbled with the buttons of his dress shirt. My

lips parted when he smoothly took it off from his shoulder to his sleeves.

Some women stared at him and his perfectly fit body.

“Athlete nga,” bulong ko pagka-iwas ng tingin.

“Huh?” Nagtatakang tanong ni Ida. “Ayan, ayos na ang itsura mo! Kaso basang-

basa ka. Your phone! Where’s your phone?”

“It was with you, diba?” Nagtatakang tanong ko.

“Oh, right!” Nilabas niya ang phone ko mula sa bulsa niya at inabot sa’kin.

“Wait, how about the captain’s phone?! Nakakahiya, Eli, hinatak mo siya sa

pool! Tinanong mo na ba?! Look at him! Basang-basa siya! Pati ang sapatos!”

Na-guilty kaagad ako at nag-lakad palapit sa kinaroroonan niya. He was seated

on the white lounge chair now, katapat ni Arkin na tumatawa pa rin. Hinubad

niya ang sapatos at medyas na basa na. He pursed his lips, obviously annoyed

now with what happened.

“U-uhm,” lumapit ako, may towel pa sa balikat.

He glanced at me once but he immediately looked down, busy with squeezing the

water out of his dress shirt. Nakita ko ang phone niya sa tabi niya, basa na.

I felt more guilty now!

“Towel,” kumuha ako ng towel sa gilid at inabot sa kanya.

Hindi siya nagsalita at tinabi lang ang dress shirt para kuhanin ang phone. He

tried to open it but as soon as it did, it flashed a green screen, then it

went black. He sighed and massaged the bridge of his nose, frustrated now.

“Okay lang ‘yan, pre. May backup naman ‘yan, diba?” Pampalubag-loob ni Arkin.

“Hayaan mo na. Wala ka namang girlfriend kaya walang message convo na

mawawala. Haha!”

“Gago, hindi nakakatulong, ah,” inis na sabi ni Sevi.

“I’m so sorry, I’ll replace it,” nahihiyang sabi ko, nawala na ata ang alak sa

sistema.

“Huwag na,” he looked at me and gave me a small smile.

“Anong huwag na? Anong gagamitin mong cellphone?” Kantyaw ni Arkin. “Sige na!

Papalitan mo na! Kasalanan naman ni Elyse! Haha!”

Masama ko siyang tinignan. He was even adding fuel to the fire!

“Ewan. May lumang phone naman ata si Luna,” sabi ni Sevi.

“I can replace it! Like, now na! Promise!” Agap ko.

Tinapunan niya lang ako ng tingin at bumuntong-hininga ulit, nakatingin na sa

basang coat na nasa gilid niya na rin, tapos nang pigain.

“Mas kailangan ko ng damit ngayon kaysa cellphone,” he shook his head.

“Y-yes! Of course!” Nagmamadali kong tinawagan ang driver ko para magpabili ng

damit, pati na rin cellphone, kahit alam kong gabi na at sarado na ang ibang

mall. Sana lang makaabot siya sa closing ng mga 10 PM na stores.

Bumalik muna ako sa hotel room para makapag-palit ng damit dahil basa na rin

ako. I also removed my makeup and just applied blush and lip tint again before

my driver knocked and gave me two paper bags.

“Hey, here. You can change in my room if you want,” inabot ko kay Sevi ang

dalawang paper bag pagkaakyat ko sa rooftop.

One was for the new phone, and the other one was for his clothes. I hope I got

the right size, though.

“Thank you,” kinuha niya lang ang paper bag ng damit at tumayo na para

pumuntang C.R.

Nanatili ang tingin ko sa paper bag ng cellphone. Arkin laughed at me because

I looked like I was rejected by a crush or something!

“Hindi niya tatanggapin ‘yan. Sa akin na lang,” tumatawang sabi niya.

O, e’di huwag. Pakialam ko? Hindi naman ako ang mawawalan!

Padabog akong umupo roon sa lounge chair at hinintay siyang bumalik para

malaman ko kung tama bang size ang napabili ko.

Tumayo ako ulit nang makita siyang naglalakad na palapit, wearing black sweatshorts and a white Adidas shirt that looked.. fit on him. It emphasized his biceps and his broad chest.

“Masyado atang maliit,” I commented.

“Okay na ‘to,” he still gave me a smile. “Thank you. Happy birthday, Elisa.”

Agad kumunot ang noo ko.

“What?!” I was so offended!

“Elyse, pre,” bulong ni Arkin sa kanya.

“Ah,” Sevi laughed awkwardly when he realized that he got it wrong. “Happy

birthday, Elyse, pre.”

I was so close to punching him in the face. I knew I did him wrong tonight but.. I really wanted to punch him in the fucking face!

“Elyse,” he corrected now, eyes still playful. “Happy birthday, Elyse.”

:)

02

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, Elyse! Ayusin mo ang ikot mo!”

Hingal na hingal akong bumaba mula sa pagkakahawak ng dalawang lalaki sa may

paa ko. Pinunasan ko muli ang pawis ko at umulit nanaman kami sa umpisa. Flyer

ako kaya mas kinakabahan ako dahil last season, nahulog ako! It kind of a big

deal for me because I was embarrassed from that. Isipin mo, national

television, ang daming nanonood tapos mahuhulog ka!

Nakakahiya talaga, lalo na kapag nakikita ko pa ang tweets nilang tinatawanan

ako dahil nahulog daw. Palpak daw. I wanted to cry but I just used those

criticisms to do better. Ngayon, mas confident na ‘ko sa ikot ko sa ere.

“Sige, water break.”

Kinuha ko kaagad ang jug ko at uminom doon. Pagkatapos, pinunasan ko ang pawis

ko gamit ang towel habang nagiiscroll sa cellphone ko.

Tumaas ang kilay ko nang makita ang notification ko sa Instagram.

sevirous started following you.

I immediately checked the profile so I would know kung sino siya. I had a

guess but I still needed to confirm it.

sevirous

21 posts – 9,876 followers – 765 following

Sevi Camero

UST Engineering. Growling Tigers.

Wow, sobrang simple ng bio, ah. Ang dami niya ring followers, though mas

marami ‘yung sa’kin kasi finofollow ako ng mga fans ng iba kong friends na

sikat tuwing nilalagay nila ‘ko sa IG story nila. So weird! Wala naman silang

makikita sa IG ko kundi mukha ko, and sometimes, my friends.

Why would he follow me, though?

“From the top!”

Binalik ko na kaagad ang phone ko sa duffel bag at tumakbo pabalik sa mat para

magsimula na ulit. It was a tiring night. 11 PM nanaman ako nakauwi, but this

time I had my driver na so less hassle kay Kuya. Busy na rin naman siya sa law

school, e.. tsaka sa girls niya.

I was inside the car, on my way home, when I opened my Instagram again. I

arched a brow when Sevi sent me a message. Hindi ko siya fino-follow kaya

napunta siya sa follow requests ko.

sevirous: kailangan ko ‘yung coat ko

Napairap ako at in-accept ang message request niya. Noong debut ko kasi, bago

siya umalis, nag-offer akong ipa-laundry ang damit niya, pati na rin ang

sapatos niya. Lahat ‘yon! Sabi ko, kung ayaw niyang tanggapin ang cellphone,

kahit ‘yun man lang so I can lessen the guilt inside me. Good thing he agreed!

elydezma: Okay, I can deliver it to you or you can get it from me. When do you

need it?

I figured out that he might be busy dahil kasagsagan ng UAAP men’s basketball

game, first round.

sevirous: may laban kami sa dlsu next week saturday doon ko na lang kukunin.

nandoon ka diba?

elydezma: DUH.

sevirous: hahaha, sige see you! :)

Right! Ano ba ‘yan! Makikita ko pa siya sa Arena! Magkalaban pa!

The next morning was a Sunday so I decided to wake up early so I could

exercise in the gym. Mayroon naman kaming gym sa bahay pero parang gusto kong

lumabas muna saglit. It was a free day for me so I wanted to go outside and

have time for myself. Nag-baon na rin ako ng damit so I could go shopping

after.

Hinatid ako ng driver hanggang sa gym. My driver also served as my bodyguard.

Kailangan kasi utos ni Daddy. Hindi siya napapakali kapag wala ako sa bahay at

mag-isa sa labas dahil nga he’s a businessman, marami siyang nakakaaway.

Iniisip niyang baka kung ano ang mangyari sa’kin. Ako pa naman ang pinakabata

sa family.

“Kuya Roel, just wait here. Nothing will happen inside the gym,” I advised

him.

“Kailangan ko pong pumasok, Ma’am,” pagpupumilit niya.

“Okay, but keep a distance. Medyo awkward sa public, e!”

I was wearing a black leggings and black sports bra. Pinusod ko rin ang buhok

ko para hindi naka-kalat sa mukha ko. Pagkapasok ko, nilapag ko kaagad ang

puting duffel bag sa gilid. Wala masyadong tao sa gym lalo na’t maaga pa

talaga. 6 AM. Nasanay na ‘kong maagang gumigising para sa morning jog. We

needed to be fit and physically healthy for the cheer dance.

I did some stretching first before I went with my cardio and core routine. I

picked a 10kg dumbbell and started doing some squats. After that, I did some

sit-ups and walking planks. I only stopped when I saw a familiar man enter the

gym.

“What the fuck,” bulong ko sa sarili ko at hininto ang ginagawa.

Kinuha ko ang towel ko at pinunasan ang pawis habang tinatanaw siyang mag-

ayos. May kausap siyang lalaki ngayon, kaibigan niya ata, so ibig sabihin

madalas siya rito, huh?

Naglalakad na siya papuntang treadmill nang biglang mapahinto dahil nakita

ako. I rolled my eyes and looked away, hindi siya pinansin. Kunwari na lang ay

wala akong nakikita.

“Uy, Elisa!” Bati niya sa’kin.

I immediately gave him a glare that could kill him. He laughed and raised both

of his hands to tell me that he was just kidding.

“Hindi mo nadala coat ko?”

Umiling lang ako at hindi nag-salita.

He was wearing a black sleeveless shirt and black gym shorts. Naka-white

siyang sneakers at may suot na itim na gloves sa kamay na hanggang knuckles

lang. He fixed his hair and smiled at me.

“Are you following me? Umamin ka,” I confronted him.

“Wew!” His brows furrowed and his eyes were filled with humor.

“Oh come on, kung crush mo ‘ko, sorry ka, you won’t get me sa paganyan-ganyan

mo. Pagsunod-sunod mo sa kung nasaan ako? Tapos minemessage mo pa ‘ko sa

Instagram asking for your coat. If I know, excuse mo lang ‘yun para-”

I stopped talking when I realized that he was not in front of me anymore!

Agad akong lumingon at nakitang tumatakbo na siya sa treadmill, hindi na ‘ko

pinakinggan! Napikon kaagad ako! Lahat ng inis ko, binuhos ko sa pag-

eexercise! I did some russian twists, binubuhos sa bolang hawak ko ang galit

ko kapag tina-tap ko sa mat. When I did some kicks, inisip ko na siya ang

sinisipa ko! Mas ginaganahan ako!

Huminto ako para uminom ng tubig. Nakita ko siya ngayon sa may bandang likod

ng gym, doing shoulder presses for his biceps and back. I watched him do that,

and when he stopped to wipe his sweat, I looked away. Muntik na niya ‘kong

makitang nakatingin sa kanya!

I did my routine again before deciding to cool down. Umupo ako sa mat to do

some stretching again. Pagkatapos, humiga ako at tinaas ang right leg ko.

Napatigil ako nang may matamaan ako.

“Aray ko, ah,” I looked at Sevi who was about to walk over.

“I’m not sorry,” sabi ko habang nakahawak sa likod ng tuhod ko, nakataas ang

binti.

“Ha?” He asked.

“I said-”

“Hattitude ka, girl.”

Inis ko siyang tinignan at hinabol pa siya ng tingin. Kumuha siya ng dumbbell

sa gilid at hindi na ‘ko pinansin pagkatapos noon.

After finishing my cool down, tumayo na ‘ko at kinuha ang duffel bag para mag-

shower. I took a cold shower and dressed up again. Naka-suot na ‘ko ng black

high-waisted shorts, white tube top, and a cropped-top Chanel jacket. I was

also wearing white sneakers.

Pagkalabas ko ng shower room, I saw Sevi on his phone, texting somebody.

Nakaupo siya sa tabi ng duffel bag ko kaya kinailangan kong lumapit para

ayusin ang gamit ko. Napaangat ang tingin niya sa’kin ngunit umiwas din para

sagutin ang tawag.

“Luna,” he greeted.

Sino naman ‘yon?

None of my business kaya binilisan ko na lang ang pag-ayos ng gamit para

mabilis nang makaalis. I didn’t mean to eavesdrop but he was so near me and I

could hear him talking! Kung pwede lang takpan ang tenga, e!

“O? Nasa gym ako, pards. Mama mo breakfast,” he laughed.

So immature.

Binaba niya ang phone at tumingin sa’kin na inaayos na ang duffel bag sa

balikat.

“Saan ka na nyan?” He asked out of the blue.

Kumunot ang noo ko at tumingin sa kanya, naguguluhan.

“Why are you asking? Close ba tayo?” I crossed my arms. “I’m going to the mall

to eat breakfast.”

“Bakit mo sinagot?” He shot back and laughed.

Ugh! He’s so annoying! Tama nga ako sa palagay ko noong unang kita ko sa

kanya! I hate his aura, and his attitude. He probably hates mine, too, but who

cares, right? This is me!

“Tara, breakfast tayo!” Masayang sabi niya at tumayo.

“W-what?!” I exclaimed.

“Hintayin mo ‘ko! Shower lang ako!”

Hindi ako makapagsalita sa gulat hanggang sa mawala na siya sa paningin ko

dahil pumasok na ng shower room. Napakurap ako at dahan-dahang umupo sa bench,

nagtataka kung hihintayin ko ba talaga siya or I’ll be rude and leave him just

like that?

Bakit ba pinaghihintay niya pa ‘ko?! Ano siya, limited-edition bag na

hinihintay kong dumating sa bahay? He’s not even that important! We’re not

even close to being friends! Wala ba siyang kaibigan, ha? Parang ang loner

niya naman! Kung sino-sino ang inaaya!

Kakaisip ko ng kung ano-ano, hindi ko sinasadyang mahintay nga siya sa labas.

Napatayo ako ulit nang makitang naglalakad na siya palabas ng shower room,

nakasuot ng itim na shorts at white shirt na may tatak ng isang local brand

ata sa gitna. He has a towel on his neck while drying up his hair with his

right hand.

“Oh, naghintay ka talaga,” he chuckled when he saw me.

“Alam mo, nakakairita ka,” inis kong kinuha ang duffel bag at sinabit sa

balikat ko para maglakad na paalis.

I heard him call for my name but I was too pissed to look back. Sumakay na

kaagad ako sa kotse at sinabi kay Kuya Roel na mag-drive na papuntang mall,

leaving that dumbass behind. Bahala siya. Kaya ko naman mag-breakfast mag-isa,

unlike him na nag-aaya pa ng kasama!

I really ate breakfast alone and shopped for some clothes. I just used my

credit card, kahit alam kong pagagalitan din ako ni Daddy pag nalaman niya.

It’s okay! Kaka-birthday ko lang!

For the whole week, wala kaming ginawa kung hindi mag-training after class.

Minsan, nakakatulog na nga ako sa klase sa sobrang pagod. Fraida would always

pinch my arm to wake me up.

“May ticket ka sa laban ng UST and DLSU?” Tanong niya habang nasa klase.

“Kailangan kami roon, duh, Ida,” napailing ako sa kanya.

“Ano ba ‘yan! Gusto kong manood!” Reklamo niya. “Oh well, baka mayroon pa

dyang nagbebenta. I’ll ask Ysa.”

Tumango na lang ako sa kanya at sinubukang makinig na sa Life and Works of

Rizal. It was my last subject for today and then dumiretso na rin ako sa

training. Ganoon lang buong week, wala masyadong nangyayari sa life ko. It was

kinda boring! Paulit-ulit ang nangyayari at wala man lang bago, except sa

times na muntikan na ‘kong mahulog ulit.

“Goodluck! Goodluck!” We cheered our basketball players.

Maraming nanonood ngayon, naglalaban ang cheers ng green at yellow. I was

wearing our cheerdance uniform in colors green and white. Kita ang kaunting

balikat ko at dibdib dahil sa hati, pati ang bewang. Fitted iyon at long

sleeves kaya medyo mainit. Pinusod ko tuloy ang buhok ko.

We stood on the stairs, may kanya-kanyang pwesto.

“Lakas ng cheer ng USTe, labanan natin, ah,” paalala ni Ate Raya.

Totoo nga at palaging malaki ang crowd nila. Napatingin kaagad ako sa baba

nang dumating na ang players ng UST. I unconsciously raised a brow when I saw

their team captain holding a towel, talking to his teammate. Nakangiti ito,

mukhang masaya ang pinag-uusapan nila.

“Hoy, nakakaloka, ang pogi talaga ni Camero, ‘no?” Rinig kong sabi ni Ate Mae

at tumawa.

I must admit na bagay sa kanya ang uniform niya. He was wearing their yellow

uniform at nakasuot ng itim na knee support sa parehong binti. Black socks din

at puting basketball shoes. His hair was in a clean cut so he looked fresh.

When the game started, we started doing our cheers. Kasama sa unang maglalaro

si Sevi. I wanted to judge the way he played but I couldn’t say anything! He

was so different in court.

“Go USTe! Go USTe! Go USTe! Go go go go!” Their crowd cheered.

And another 3 points from Camero. He high-fived some of his players and ran

towards the other side of the court. Everyone was wilding in their side,

nakatayo na at winawagayway ang mga hawak na balloons.

Naagaw ng teammate nila ang bola kaya tumakbo ulit sila sa kabilang side. Sevi

positioned himself on the three-point arc. Pinasa sa kanya ang bola and when

he was about to shoot it, our player suddenly jumped and hit him with his

elbow.

“Oh,” I whispered when he fell on the floor.

The referee called a foul on one of our players. It’s fine! It’s okay! Lamang

nga lang ang UST ngayon, pero baka kaya pa namang habulin! I don’t know. Alam

ko namang magaling sila dahil natalo kami sa kanila last season. Anyway, first

round pa lang naman! Kaya ‘yan!

Everyone cheered for the free throw. Sevi bounced the ball on the floor twice

before bending his knees a little and shooting the ball. Everyone cheered nang

ma-shoot ‘yon. Mayroon pa siyang dalawa. He kind of looked around first before

smiling and shooting again. Pumasok ang pangalawa, pati ang pangatlo. Parang

nawalan na ‘ko ng pag-asang mananalo kami!

Nag-timeout ang La Salle at habang tahimik ang crowd, we started cheering for

our players, para Â naman ganahan sila.

Nag-pahinga muna si Sevi after that at pinalitan siya at ‘yung isa nilang

teammate. Sevi sat down on the bench and drank on his water jug. Napalingon

siya sa side namin kaya nagtama ang tingin namin.

He waved his hand a little and gave me a smile. I bit my lower lip and looked

away while clapping my hands and doing our cheer. Nang ibalik ko ang tingin sa

kanya, nakita kong tumatawa siya, pinupunasan ang pawis gamit ang towel.

He was a good player, and he seemed like a good Captain, too. Nakita ko kasi

kung paano siya makipag-usap sa mga ka-team niya. He was guiding them

throughout the game.

Naka-lamang ang La Salle sa second quarter hanggang third. Nag-tuos sila sa

fourth dahil nakahabol ang UST. Nang marinig na namin ang buzzer, nagsigawan

na ang mga taga-UST at nagwagayway ng balloons.

“Sayang, shit,” bulong ko.

Damn, nakapasok ang tira nung player ng UST at lumamang ng three points!

Sayang! Sobrang nakakapanghinayang! But, oh well. Bawi na lang ulit next

round.

Kinuha ko ang paper bag ng damit ni Sevi at bumaba sa may court. Lumapit muna

ako sa players namin para i-congrats sila kahit hindi nanalo.

“It’s okay, guys! You did good!” Sambit ko sa mga Kuya ko sa basketball.

“Sayang,” Kuya Ed sighed. “Mag-sorry lang ako kay Camero sa foul.”

Nakita ko siyang naglakad papunta sa kinaroroonan ni Sevi. Sinundan ko siya ng

tingin kaya napansin kong may kausap ngayon si Sevi na tatlong babaeng naka-

dilaw na shirt. One woman hugged his neck tightly, tumatalon pa sa sobrang

tuwa. Sevi was smiling and holding her on her waist.

Napaiwas ako at binaba na lang ang tingin sa paper bag na hawak ko. Ano?

Ibibigay ko pa ba ‘to? Nakakahiya naman lumapit sa kanya at sa mga girls niya.

Ang dami, e!

“Ano, Eli? Tara na?” Aya ni Ate Mae sa’kin at inakbayan ako.

“Uh, wait lang. I’ll just give this to.. someone,” pagdadahilan ko.

“Okay, we’ll wait for you here!”

Lumingon na ‘ko ulit sa gawi ni Sevi na kausap na si Kuya Ed ngayon. Our

player was probably apologizing and Sevi kept on waving his hand, smiling.

Naglakad na ‘ko palapit nang makitang wala na ang girls niya.

“Okay lang, pre, ano ka ba. Wala namang sugat,” Sevi touched his jaw and

chuckled.

Napatingin siya sa’kin nang makita akong naglalakad palapit. Tinapik siya ni

Kuya Ed sa balikat bago naglakad paalis dahil tinawag siya ng coach. I walked

towards Sevi and stopped in front of him. He gave me a smile habang

pinupunasan ng towel ang pawis niya.

“Congrats,” bungad ko.

“Thank you,” he was still smiling. “Sorry, amoy pawis na ata ako.”

I could smell him but he didn’t really smell bad. I could smell some manly

scent or perfume, hindi amoy ng pawis so I didn’t know what he was talking

about.

Anyway, siyempre hindi ko na sinabi ‘yun dahil baka mag-yabang. Ganoon pa

naman ata ugali niya!

“Here are your clothes,” inabot ko sa kanya ang paper bag.

“Salamat,” kinuha niya ‘yon mula sa kamay ko. “Uuwi ka na?”

I arched a brow and crossed my arms.

“Why are you asking again?” Iisipin ko na talagang he’s making moves on me!

“Wala lang,” he shrugged. “Hindi mo sasagutin?”

“No, I’m not going home. May training pa kami,” I still answered because he

looked like he was waiting for it.

“Ah,” tumango siya. “Goodluck. Break a leg?” He joked.

“How dare you!” I inhaled dramatically.

“Joke lang,” tumawa siya.

“Sevirous! Tara na, aba! Lumalandi ka pa dyan!”

Napalingon kami sa babaeng tumawag sa kanya. Sevi rolled his eyes and gave her

a ‘wait’ sign before turning his gaze back to me.

“I’ll go na,” sambit ko.

“Sige, ingat,” he gave me a nod.

Tumalikod na ‘ko sa kanya at tumatakbong bumalik kila Ate Raya. Makahulugan

ang tingin nila sa’kin pagkabalik ko! I didn’t even notice that they were

watching me while I was talking to the team captain of the enemy!

“Baka iba na ang i-cheer mo nyan sa susunod, ah?” Ate Raya smirked.

“I don’t know what you’re saying, Ate,” my brows furrowed.

“Baka hindi na green ang shirt mo next time. Yellow na,” sumali pa si Ate Mae

at tumawa silang dalawa.

“Ew! My god!” Umiling ako kaagad nang ma-realize ang pinaparating nila.

Gabing-gabi na ulit ako nakauwi. Sunday na ulit kinabukasan kaya walang

training. I decided to go to the gym again, kung nasaan ako last week. I went

there around 7 AM, medyo late than last time.

Napahawak ako sa dibdib ko dahil sa gulat nang makasalubong si Sevi sa

entrance. Binitawan ko kaagad ang handle ng pinto para paunahin siya.

He pulled the door and waited for me to go in. Tahimik lang akong pumasok sa

loob, dala-dala ang duffel bag ko. My bodyguard was standing from afar,

susunod mamaya.

So every Sunday morning, nandito rin siya? I figured it out when the woman

from the counter greeted him, hindi na chineck ang membership card niya. So he

wasn't really following me.. and it looked like I was the one following him!

I presented my card before going inside. Nakaupo na si Sevi sa bench, fixing

his gloves. He was wearing a white sleeveless shirt this time and black

shorts, then white rubber shoes. Umupo ako sa opposite bench at nilapag ang

duffel bag ko roon. Inayos ko ang ponytail ko bago pumunta sa treadmill para

tumakbo muna.

Hindi ako nagsalita nang pinili ni Sevi ang treadmill na katabi ng sa akin! I

tried my best to look in front. He did not talk to me either so okay lang din

hindi magsalita. I didn't want to talk to him din naman.

After running, I started doing my core routine. I did some leg lounges first

and box exercises. After that, I did some a side plank on the mat. Tumutulo na

ang pawis ko at nakaharap pa sa pwesto ng Sevi na ‘yon! He stopped doing his

exercise when he saw my face.

“What now?” Tinaasan ko siya ng kilay.

“What?” He mocked.

“Why are you looking at me?” Hirap na sabi ko bago bumalik sa normal planking

position.

“Hindi kita tinitignan. Tinitignan mo kasi ako kaya napapatingin din ako

sa’yo,” he explained with humor in his eyes like he was enjoying seeing me

suffer from my plank position.

“Just do your fucking thing and stop staring at me,” masungit na sabi ko.

“Wew!”

Pagkatapos ng planking, I did some glute bridges and then cool down.

Pagkatapos ko mag-stretching, dumiretso na ulit ako sa shower room para

makaligo at makapagpalit ng damit. I wore a simple pair of maong shorts and

white shirt this time. Nagsuot na lang ako ng black belt to add some style on

it.

Pagkalabas ko ng shower room, nakita kong tapos na rin maligo si Sevi at

nakapagpalit na rin ng damit. He was wearing a black shirt and a pair of

ripped jeans. Nang lagpasan ko siya, naamoy ko ulit ang pabango niya.

“Oy, Elisa,” tawag niya.

“That’s not me,” sambit ko, refusing to look back.

“Breakfast,” aya niya.

‘Yan nanaman sa breakfast na ‘yan! He scammed me last time! Pinipikon niya

lang ata ako, e! I don’t even know what’s his real deal. Bakit ba siya ganyan?

Like we’re even friends?! Hell, no!

“Breakfast my ass,” I rolled my eyes.

“Hala, bastos,” he laughed.

Inis akong lumingon sa kanya. Dala na niya ang itim niyang backpack at

handang-handa nang umalis. Tinanaw ko ang bodyguard ko sa pinakagilid ng gym,

nakatayo roon na parang statwa.

“Ayaw mo ba? Sarap pa naman ng tapsilugan dyan sa tabi,” he shrugged.

“Tapsilugan?” My brows furrowed.

“Tapa, sinangag, itlog,” pagpapaliwanag niya. “Gusto mo tikman? Libre kita!

Tara!”

“I have money,” inismiran ko siya.

Kakatapos lang mag-gym, sige nanaman ang kain? Parang hindi tama ‘yon, ah! Oh

well, kailangan ko naman talaga ng food sa katawan.

“I have my.. bodyguard with me,” awkward na sabi ko. “I can’t today.”

Tumingin siya sa paligid at hinanap ‘yon. Pagkatapos, tumango lang siya at

nag-handa nang umalis.

“Sige, see you around, loud and round!” He waved his hand and started walking

towards the entrance.

Pinanood ko siyang umalis at pinabalik-balik ang tingin mula sa bodyguard ko

at sa entrance ng gym. Nawala na siya sa paningin ko.

Dali-dali kong kinuha ang duffel bag ko at tumakbo palabas ng gym. Narinig

kong tinawag ako ni Kuya Roel kaya lumingon ako saglit.

“Just wait in the car! I’ll be back in a few minutes, promise!” I shouted.

Hinabol ko si Sevi na nakita kong hindi pa nakakalayo. Napahinto siya sa

paglalakad nang mapalingon sa’king tumatakbo palapit.

“Let’s go!” Nagmamadaling sabi ko at nilagpasan siya.

Tumakbo rin siya para habulin ako, lumilingon pa sa likod at nagtataka.

“Bakit tayo tumatakbo?” Nagtatakang tanong niya sa’kin at huminto bigla.

Tumawa ako at tumingin sa likuran. Hindi ko na nakita si Kuya Roel kaya

huminto na rin ako sa pagtakbo ko.

“Nalagpasan na tuloy natin!” Napakamot siya sa ulo niya.

“E’di let’s go back! Dali, kailangan kong bumalik kaagad.”

“Para naman kitang tinakas, uy,” umiling siya.

“Just go! Ang bagal mo!”

Tinulak ko siya para magsimula na siyang maglakad pabalik. Nakasunod lang ako

sa kanya hanggang sa makarating kami sa maliit na karinderya. It was hot at

maraming kumakain but we managed to find a table near the television. Pinaupo

niya ‘ko roon at siya na ang nag-abalang um-order ng pagkain.

Tumingin ako sa paligid, pinapaypayan ang sarili gamit ang kamay. Some people

were looking at me in a ridiculous way, like I did not belong there. Umismid

lang ako at tinuon na lang ang atensyon sa TV.

“It’s so hot,” sabi ko kay Sevi pagkabalik niya.

“Wew, senyorita? Anong gagawin ko? Bibili ng aircon?” Sarkastikong tanong

niya.

“Wala, I’m just telling! Because we ran, duh!”

“Sino ba kasing nagsabing tumakbo tayo?” Balik niya sa’kin.

Sumimangot ako at nagpahalumbaba, hinihintay ang pagkain naming dalawa. He was

fumbling on his phone now. Napatingin tuloy ako roon nang mapansing may phone

na nga siyang bago! So he really didn’t need the one I bought, huh.

Napansin niya atang nakatingin ako sa phone niya kaya tinaas niya ‘yon para

mapakita sa’kin.

“Binenta sa’kin ng kaibigan ko,” he smiled.

“I didn’t ask,” masungit na balik ko.

“Sungit ng bata,” he shook his head.

Parang nag-usok ang ulo ko sa inis! Bata?! Ako?! Tinawag niya ba ‘kong bata,

ha?!

“Excuse me, I just turned 18!” Inis kong hinampas ang lamesa gamit ang isang

kamay ko.

“Ah, oo nga pala, you’re not kabataan anymore,” he chuckled.

“At ikaw? Gurang?” I shot back.

He dramatically inhaled and held his chest like he was shocked and hurt from

my statement. Tinaasan ko siya ng kilay, naghahamon sa kanya.

“16 pa lang ako!” He lied.

“Oh, really? You look 61,” I insulted. It wasn’t true though.

“And you look-”

“Ano, ha?!” Hamon ko kaagad.

“Great,” he smiled.

I smirked at him. Crush na talaga ako nito!

“Alexander the Great,” he added and laughed like crazy.

Agad kong inabot ang buhok niya para sabunutan siya pero agad din siyang

nakailag, tumatawa pa rin. Bumalik lang siya sa inuupuan niya nang dumating na

ang pagkain namin. I stared at it for a few seconds, wondering how it will

taste like.

“Hindi inaabsorb ng mata ang nutrients ng pagkain kaya kumain ka na,”

panggugulo niya sa mga iniisip ko.

“Okay po, Kuya,” I smirked.

He rolled his eyes playfully while pouring water on my glass, hindi man lang

naapektuhan sa sinabi ko.

“Kapag hindi ‘to masarap, you’ll wear green sa CDC,” I dared him.

“Kapag masarap, you’ll wear a tiger shirt on our next game. G?” Paghahamon

niya rin.

“Okay!” Pag-payag ko, kinakabahan nang tikman.

Tinikman ko na ang tapa at sinamahan ng kanin. Nakatingin siya sa’kin habang

ngumunguya ako, tinitignan ang itsura ko.

Oh shit.

Napapikit ako nang mariin bago lumunok at uminom ng tubig.

“O, ano?” He asked, smiling.

I sighed heavily.

“May extra tiger shirt ka ba?” I asked and he laughed.

:)

03

“Bakit mo tinakasan ang bodyguard mo, Elyse?!”

Napanguso ako habang nakayuko, pinaglalaruan ang daliri ko. Nakaupo ako ngayon

sa malaking sofa at sa harapan ko naman ay si Daddy na naka-corporate attire

pa. Gabi na nang makabalik siya galing sa work. I thought Kuya Roel won’t tell

anything kay Daddy! Mali ako! He betrayed me!

“I wanted to.. Uh.. Eat somewhere,” pagdadahilan ko, hindi pa rin makatingin.

“Then eat with your bodyguard around! Bakit? Hindi ba pwede ‘yon, Elyse?!” He

was scolding me so bad.

“I wanted to be alone,” I pouted more.

“At kapag mag-isa ka, anong ginagawa mo? Nagwawaldas ng pera!”

Sumimangot ako lalo at tinignan saglit si Daddy na galit na galit ngayon. Agad

akong umiwas ng tingin sa kanya at nanghingi ng tulong kay Mommy na nakaupo

rin sa kabilang sofa, nakikinig sa sermon. Hindi niya ‘ko tinitignan para

mapigilan niya ang sarili niyang makisali.

“I was just treating myself because.. it was my birthday,” tumingin ako sa

kisame para umiwas.

“Your birthday?!” Daddy scoffed. “Ilang araw ba ang birthday mo? You went

shopping a week before your birthday, 3 days before your birthday, a day

before your birthday, on your birthday itself, after your birthday, and even

two days after your birthday! You’re making my head ache!”

Huminga ako nang malalim at pinalobo saglit ang pisngi ko para pigilan ang

sariling magsalita dahil baka mas lalo lang siyang magalit. I looked like a

puppy being scolded by its owner.

“Money is great, Elyse,” Daddy sighed. “But money is the source of evil, and I

don’t want you to end up like other people. You need to control yourself.”

“I won’t be evil, Daddy, please. I promise I won’t do it again,” I tried to

calm him down.

“I already heard-”

Napatingin kami sa pinto nang bumukas ito bigla. My eyes lit up when I saw my

brother at the door holding a book in his hand, and a phone on the other hand.

Napatigil siya nang makita ang sitwasyon namin.

“What’s happening?” Nagtatakang tanong niya.

“Tumakas ako sa bodyguard ko, Kuya, and then, I don’t know how, but we

suddenly talked about money!” Pagkekwento ko, mukhang kinawawa pa.

“You deserve that,” Kuya Shan chuckled.

“Kuya!”

“Shan, what brings you here?” Tumayo si Mommy. “Nag dinner ka na ba? I can

prepare food for you-”

“May kukuhanin lang po ako sa taas, Tita,” my brother cut her off.

Tumango si Mommy at dahan-dahang umupo ulit. Bumuntong-hininga si Daddy at

umakyat na lang ulit sa study room, mukhang tapos na ‘kong sermunan, thanks to

Shan! Buti na lang at dumating siya kaya hindi na makapagsalita si Daddy.

Umakyat na rin ako sa kwarto ko para mag-shower. Since tapos naman na ‘kong

pagalitan, pwede na ‘kong mag-relax! Kinalimutan ko na lang lahat ng ‘yon.

Kinabukasan, Monday nanaman kaya I attended my classes first before the

training. Maagang natapos ang classes ko kaya naman maaga rin akong nakarating

sa pinegte-trainingan namin. Nag-palit ako ng shorts at shirt bago umupo sa

sahig para hintayin ang iba.

Nilabas ko ang phone ko para mag-check kung may stock na ‘yung gusto kong

press powder. Ang tagal ko nang hinihintay pero hanggang ngayon, wala pa rin!

Bakit maglalabas pa sila ng product kung hindi rin naman ako makakabili?!

I took a cute selfie of myself looking stressed and posted it on my IG story

with the caption ‘ang tagal nila gosh’.

Napakunot ang noo ko nang makitang may nag-reply.

sevirous: training?

Nag-type kaagad ako ng isasagot ko.

elydezma: Yes, why are you asking?

sevirous: wala lang hahaha kami rin training atm

elydezma: Who asked?

sevirous: baka gusto mo lang malaman na nagtetraining kami para sa laro

ngayong saturday kung saan ka magsusuot ng tiger shirt

elydezma: Wala ka pang binibigay na shirt.

elydezma: And also, akala ko ba training atm? You can dribble while typing?

Stupid ass.

sevirous: hindi ka sure

I rolled my eyes and turned my phone off when I saw our coach. Tumayo na ‘ko

at tumulong sa pag-aayos ng mat. At 7 PM, breaktime kaya naman nilabas ko ang

packed dinner ko at nagpaikot kami roon sa sahig ng teammates ko.

“May crush akong basketball player na taga-UP,” kinikilig na sabi ni Fiona.

“Ako rin! Taga-NU!” Si Tania naman.

Tahimik lang akong kumakain habang nag-uusap-usap sila sa mga crush nilang

player sa iba’t-ibang school. I couldn’t care less. Napasubo na lang ako ng

dalawang piraso ng grapes na nasa baon ko ngayon.

“Si Eli, may something sa kanila nung captain ng UST!”

Nabulunan ako bigla.

Inabot ko kaagad ang tubig habang umuubo-ubo ako, sinusubukang tanggalin sa

lalamunan ang ubas na nalunok ko. Nadura ko tuloy sa tissue at dali-daling

uminom ng tubig. I wasn’t expecting that! Nananahimik na nga ako, nasali pa

‘ko sa usapan!

“Omg, kaya pala last game, I saw them talking to each other sa gilid! Sila

lang dalawa! Todo ngiti si Camero habang si Eli naman ang pabebe,

pinaglalaruan pa ‘yung hands na parang nahihiya! My god, anong palabas ‘to?”

Singit ni Queenie.

“All of you got the wrong idea! There’s nothing going on between Sevi and I!”

Todo deny ko sa kanila.

Wala naman kasi talaga!

“Asus, okay lang ‘yan, bebe girl. Lahat tayo nafa-fall paminsan-minsan sa

basketball player,” inakbayan ako ni Ate Mae.

“Well, sorry! Sa piloto lang ako na-fall!” Umiling ako kaagad.

Mabuti na lang at natapos kaagad ang breaktime dahil pinipilit talaga nilang

may something sa’min ni Sevi kahit hindi naman talaga totoo! Kahit anong

tanggi ko, inaasar nila ‘ko. It was just once! Once lang kami nag-usap during

the game at ‘yun ‘yung inabot ko ang clothes niya sa kanya. Lahat na lang ba

may meaning?! My gosh!

Pagkatapos ng training, umuwi na kaagad ako at nag-shower tapos diretso na

higa sa sobrang pagod. Kinuha ko ang phone ko at chineck kung may messages ba

from Fraida regarding the schoolworks, pero ibang message ang nakita ko.

sevirous sent a photo.

Binuksan ko kaagad at nakita roon ang yellow na shirt na may tiger design at

nakalagay ang name ng UST. Ang laki pa but I had no choice since nakipag-

pustahan ako sa kanya. Dapat pala hindi ko na ‘yon ginawa! Manonood tuloy ako

ng game nila sa Saturday kahit hindi naman La Salle ang kalaban! Nakakainis!

Isasama ko si Fraida, bahala siya!

elydezma: Give me two tickets. Kailangan ko ng kasama. I don’t want to go

there alone.

sevirous: luh, isa lang nakuha ko. bakit ngayon mo lang sinabi?

elydezma: WHAT ANG LONER KO NAMAN DOON

sevirous: gusto mong sumama sa mga kaibigan ko?

elydezma: No, thanks. I don’t know them.

I would rather be alone than be with his friends! I mean, bakit ako sasama sa

friends niya?! As if naroon ako to support him?! Naroon ako dahil nakipag-

pustahan ako! Aalis din naman ako kaagad pagkatapos siguro ng first quarter.

Wala namang pinag-usapan na dapat tapusin ang laro, e.

Noong Friday, wala kaming pasok at training so I agreed to get the shirt from

Sevi on that day. I told him to just meet me in a mall near him. I was wearing

a pair of ripped jeans and a black tank top. I partnered it with black heels

and a Gucci sling bag. Inipit ko sa ponytail ang buhok ko at nag-suot ng

shades.

Nauna pa ‘kong makarating sa kanya sa ice cream shop. I ordered a banana split

for me so I could eat while waiting. Si Kuya Roel, nakatayo sa labas ng shop,

sa may pinakagilid kung saan niya ‘ko makikita.

Napatingin ako sa orasan habang nakasubo ang kutsara sa bibig ko. What the

fuck, he’s already late for 1 minute! Bakit ba niya ‘ko pinaghihintay?! I

don’t like waiting!

Kapag naubos ko ‘tong ice cream ko at wala pa siya, I’ll just leave.

“Sorry, traffic.”

Napaangat ang tingin ko sa lalaking humatak ng upuan sa tapat ko. Sevi was

wearing a black shirt and a pair of maong pants. Suot niya ulit ang metal

necklace niya at itim na wristwatch. Napatingin ako sa suot ko.

Why are we always wearing the same thing?! Or the same colors?!

“Hala, okay ka lang?” He suddenly asked.

Kumunot ang noo ko, hindi siya naiintindihan.

“Kawawa ka naman at sira-sira ang pantalon mo,” he made a sad face while

staring at my pants.

Wow! Just wow! Kakarating niya lang, pinapainit na niya ang ulo ko! What a

talent he has!

“After making me wait here, ‘yan ang ibubungad mo sa’kin?” I raised a brow.

Tumingin siya sa relo niya at nagsalubong ang kilay bago binalik ang tingin

sa’kin.

“Dalawang minuto lang akong late, ah?” Pagdepensa niya sa sarili niya.

“You know what I value the most?” I leaned so he could hear me better.

“Ano?” He also leaned over the table, imitating me.

I smiled at him sweetly and showed him my expensive watch.

“Sus, ‘yan lang pala, e. Marami namang relo sa divisoria, kaya ko ‘yang

palitan,” sumandal na ulit siya sa upuan niya.

“It’s time!” Inis na sabi ko.

“It’s time to what?” Naguguluhang tanong niya.

“Time! I value time the most! Ugh, ang tanga!” I crossed my arms and shook my

head.

Tumawa siya sa itsura ko at humalukipkip, pinagmamasdan ako. Umirap ako sa

kanya at pinagpatuloy ang pag-kain ko ng ice cream ko.

“Order lang ako,” he smiled and tapped the table twice to get my attention.

Tumango ako at tumayo na siya para bumili ng sariling ice cream. Nakabalik

naman siya kaagad, dala-dala ang isang cup ng Cookies n’ Cream na may dalawang

Oreo. Napakunot ang noo ko. Usually, they only give one!

“Nagpadagdag ka ng Oreo?” I asked him.

“Huh? Hindi. Dalawa naman talaga, ah?” Tumingin siya sa cup niya.

Lumingon ako sa babae sa counter who was staring at Sevi, not minding the

customer ordering. Napairap ako at binalik ang tingin sa lalaking nasa harapan

ko, ine-enjoy na ang ice cream niya.

“Where’s the shirt?” I asked.

Inabot niya ang paper bag sa ilalim ng lamesa at inabot sa’kin. I reached for

it and looked inside the bag. I saw a yellow shirt and a ticket.

My brows furrowed when I realized that there were two tickets. Tumingin kaagad

ako sa kanya, nagtataka.

“Akala ko isa lang ang nakuha mo?”

Tinanggal niya ang kutsara sa bibig niya para magsalita.

“Sabi mo ayaw mong mag-isa?” He arched a brow.

I pursed my lips and placed the tickets on the table. Nilabas ko ang shirt

para tignan kung gaano ‘yon kalaki. It was just his size and he was totally

larger and taller than me! I could just tuck it inside my pants so I didn’t

need to worry about it. It smelled like him, too.

“Finish that so I can go home na,” I pointed at his cup.

Tumango siya at binilisan ang pag-ubos ng ice cream. Nang ilapag na niya ang

empty cup, tumayo na kaagad ako para umalis.

“I’m going,” paalam ko at naglakad na paalis, hindi na hinintay ang sagot

niya.

I was so worried about what I would say to my dad if ever isumbong ako ni Kuya

Roel na nag-ice cream ako with a guy! Well, I could just tell him na friend

ko! I have many friends! Though, hindi ko naman talaga siya friend. Bahala na.

I need to lie to save myself from the sermon.

Good thing Kuya Roel did not tell my dad anything. Siguro inisip din niya na

kung sino-sino naman ang kasama ko kumain sa labas kaya hindi siya big deal.

Wait.. my dad knows Sevi! Anak ng secretary niya, right?! Hindi ba suspicious

kapag nalaman niya? Pero kain lang naman, ah! May kinuha lang ako!

“Why am I overthinking this,” I whispered to myself.

The next day, I started preparing before lunch. Nag-shower na ‘ko at nag-suot

ng mom jeans tsaka ‘yung tiger shirt na binigay ni Sevi. Naka-tuck in dahil

masyado siyang oversized. I also wore my Gucci belt so I could add some style.

Nag-white sneakers lang ako para comfortable.

I let my hair down and just brought a hair tie with me. White na sling bag

lang din ang dinala ko. I texted Fraida to come over after lunch and she

really did kahit last minute lang na aya. She was really my ride or die

friend.

“Why are we even watching this? It’s not like La Salle ang maglalaro!” Reklamo

niya nang makapasok sa bahay.

“I lost a bet, okay?” I explained.

“And why should I wear yellow?!” Reklamo niya ulit, pero sinunod pa rin naman.

She was wearing a yellow tank top and maong skirt. Naka-yellow din na

headband. Sa tingin ko nga mas prepared pa siya sa’kin dahil yellow din ang

bag!

“Alam mo, Ida, kulang na lang may UST balloon ka na,” pansin ko sa kanya.

“Ano ka ba! Mamaya pa! Hihingi ako!” She was excited. “I also memorized their

cheers! Turuan kita mamaya! Black gold, black white!”

I felt like a traitor!

Nahiya tuloy ako pagkarating sa arena. I couldn’t look around and just went

straight inside to find a seat. Fraida, on the other hand, went around and

asked someone for a balloon! Napasapo ako sa noo ko, nahihiya dahil hindi

naman ako Thomasian! I was like a spy!

“Ayan na! Ayan na, they’re here!” Hinampas ako ni Ida ng balloon.

I looked in front and watched the arrival of the Growling Tigers. Nasa harapan

si Sevi at may hawak na bola sa isang kamay habang ang isa, nakaakbay sa

teammate. They were talking about something serious.

He was wearing his yellow jersey with a number 2 on it, white knee support,

and white sneakers again. Umupo siya sa bench at nilapag ang gamit doon, pati

ang bola. He looked around for a bit then smiled at those two girls seated

near his side. Lumapit siya saglit at nakipag-usap.

“He’s so friendly with girls,” siniko ako ni Ida.

“And so?” I arched a brow.

“Wala lang! Share ko lang!”

Nang ibalik ko ang tingin sa harapan, nagtama ang tingin namin. Ngumiti siya

sa’kin ngunit tumalikod agad dahil tinawag ng coach. I pursed my lips and just

waited for the game to start.

Sevi got the ball first and ran towards the other side, tapos pinasa niya sa

teammate niya. Their teammate tried to shoot it but it did not go inside so

Sevi jumped to shoot it again. It was their first point.

Hindi ko naman school ‘yon pero bakit ako kinakabahan? I was so nervous during

the game. Tuwing nakaka-shoot, nagsisigawan ang mga tao. I was just quiet,

mariin ang tingin sa bola, sinusundan ang galaw.

Three points from Sevi at naka-lamang kaagad sila sa first quarter. However,

bumaliktad sa second and third quarter. Napasapo ako sa noo ko, getting

frustrated now! Bakit ba hindi ma-shoot ‘yung bola?! Ano ba naman ‘yan!

Sevi went back to the game after resting for a bit. He gestured at his

teammates before getting the ball from the opponent.

“Oh my god, yes,” I whispered when the ball went inside the net.

“Go USTe! Go USTe! Go go go go! Go USTe!” Nagwawala na si Ida.

“You traitor,” I pulled her hair playfully. “You cheer louder than the real

tigers at the back.”

“YES! GO SEVI!” Sigaw niya at winagayway ang balloon, hindi ako pinansin.

60-63 na ang score! It was so close! Kaunti na lang! Napatingin tuloy ako sa

natitirang oras. Ilang segundo na lang. Sana ay mabawi nila ‘yon.

Wait, ang sabi ko aalis na ‘ko after ng first quarter, ah!

“Ida, I think we need to go,” I pulled her arm.

“What?! Tapusin na natin! Kaunti na lang ‘yung oras, oh!” She pointed at the

court.

I sighed and went back to my seat. I bit my lower lip and stared at the

scores. The other school got the ball again, at naka-shoot ng three points

kaya nadagdagan ang gap. I was so nervous I couldn’t afford watching anymore!

“I think they will lose. Let’s just go,” kinuha ko ulit ang bag ko at tumayo

para umalis na.

Hinatak ulit ako ni Fraida para pabalikin ako. I closed my eyes and sat down,

refusing to watch the rest of the game. Nang marinig ko ang buzzer at sigawan

ng crowd, saka ko lang tinignan ang score.

“Oh my god!” I exclaimed and jumped out of excitement. “Ah! We won!”

“We won!” Ulit ni Fraida.

Pareho kaming napatigil at sabay naghampasan dahil sa sinabi.

“Gago, hindi tayo Thomasian,” she laughed.

“Tara na,” aya ko kay Ida.

“Bakit ba nagmamadali ka? My god, chill! Let’s go near!”

Hinatak niya ulit ako pababa ng stairs para makalapit sa may court. I tried to

stop her but she really wanted to go down, lalo na nang makita ang kaibigan na

taga UST! Nakipag-chikahan na siya roon habang nasa gilid ako ng hagdan,

hinihintay siyang matapos.

Napalingon ako kay Sevi na nagpupunas ng pawis gamit ang towel. He also looked

around and stopped until our eyes met. He smiled and walked towards me.

Sinandal niya sa may railings ang braso.

“Tinapos mo pala ‘yung laro,” he smirked. “Sabi mo aalis ka kaagad?”

“I wanted to but Ida was so persistent to finish the game,” bumaba ako ng isa

pang palapag sa hagdanan para magkarinigan na kami.

Natawa siya saglit nang tignan ang suot ko. Kinuha niya kaagad ang phone niya

at tinaas ang pointing finger niya, letting me know that he would take a

picture. I wasn’t prepared! Tumawa siya at tinignan ang picture.

“Delete that! I probably looked dumb!” Sinubukan kong abutin ang phone niya.

“Feeling, hindi naman kasama mukha mo,” he laughed.

Masama ko siyang tinignan at sinubukan ulit abutin ang phone pero nilayo na

niya sa’kin ‘yon. He laughed at me and held my hand to stop me from reaching

out.

Agad kong binawi ang kamay ko at hinampas sa kanya ‘yon.

“Sevi!”

Napalingon kami sa dalawang babaeng kausap niya kanina. Naglalakad na ito

palapit, nakangiti at mapang-asar ang tingin. Yumakap sa leeg niya ‘yung isang

babae at pagkatapos, sinampal siya nang mahina sa pisngi.

“Congrats!” Sabi nito.

“Wala si Luna, may tinatapos na plates,” sabi nung isang babae.

“Oo nga, sabi niya nga,” tumango si Sevi.

I bit my lower lip and tried to walk away but Sevi suddenly talked to me!

“Hoy, Elisa, saan ka pupunta?” He playfully asked.

Irita akong lumingon sa kanya at bumaba ulit sa hagdan. Those two girls were

already smiling at me meaningfully. Gustong-gusto ko nang makatakas sa tingin

nila!

“I’ll be going na. I have training,” pagpapaliwanag ko.

“Sige,” tumango si Sevi. “Ingat.”

Tumalikod na ‘ko at hinatak na si Ida sa braso para makaalis na kami kaagad

doon. Kuya Roel was already waiting for us at the parking lot. Tuwang-tuwa si

Ida na nagkekwento tungkol sa experience niya kanina na parang first time

manood ng basketball game.

Napatigil ako nang may maalala ako. Oh shoot!

Nilabas ko ang phone ko at binuksan ang Instagram.

elydezma: Congrats.

He was already typing.

sevirous: salamat hahaha

Hindi na ‘ko nag-chat pagkatapos noon. I became so busy with school and

training at wala na rin naman kaming pag-uusapan. I just had to return his

tiger shirt. I forgot about it twice and just remembered after two weeks.

elydezma: I need to return your shirt.

sevirous: sure ka gusto mo ibalik?

Napakunot ang noo ko.

elydezma: Bakit hindi?

sevirous: 2 weeks nang nasayo e akala ko wala ka nang balak ibalik. mamaya

ginawa mo na palang pampatulog ‘yan sa gabi wew

elydezma: Ew u r so disgusting isaksak mo sa baga mo ‘yung shirt mo

sevirous: o nasan na? akin na

elydezma: Get it from me.

sevirous: amp bakit ako?!

elydezma: And bakit ako? Ikaw ang may need. This is your shirt.

sevirous: edi sayo na wag mo na ibalik kunwari ka pa e.

elydezma: FINE I’LL GO.

Inis kong nilapag ang phone ko sa side table at natulog na. I was so annoyed

at him! Hindi ko alam kung saan ko siya pupuntahan! Sa UST ba? What the hell,

ang layo! Bakit kailangan ko siyang dayuhin just for the shirt?

Ang feelingero kasi! Kapag hindi ko binalik, he would think that I have a

crush on him which is not the case! It will never ever happen!

“Bwisit ka, Sevi,” bulong ko bago matulog.

Next day was a Friday. Hapon pa ang training kaya naman may free time akong

pumunta sa school nila. Nagpahatid ulit ako kay Kuya Roel sa UST Hospital and

had him park at the carpark, kung saan napakainit! Kakababa ko lang ng car,

parang hinampas na ang mukha ko ng mainit na hangin!

“Bakit po tayo nasa hospital, Ma’am? Okay lang po ba kayo?” Tanong ni Kuya

Roel.

“Just wait at the lobby, Kuya Roel. I have an appointment with my OB,”

pagpapalusot ko. “For sure, you don’t want to come with me, right?”

“Uh, okay, Ma’am,” tumango siya.

Dala-dala ko ang maliit na paper bag ng Chanel with a tiger shirt inside.

Nauuna akong maglakad kay Kuya Roel papasok ng hospital and then I advised him

to just sit in the lobby. Lumiko ako sa may elevator at dahan-dahang sumilip.

Nang makitang hindi siya nakatingin, I walked outside casually so he won’t

suspect anything.

Nakahinga ako nang maluwag nang makalabas ng hospital. Nilabas ko ang phone ko

at nag-chat sa kanyang nandito na ‘ko. I was walking around, waiting for him

to reply. Lunchtime ng students so maraming tao.

I stopped walking when I saw a familiar face. Nagtago ako sa gilid at pinanood

si Sevi.

He was holding on to the strap of his black backpack, walking with a woman

wearing an Archi uniform. Sumingkit ang mata ko para makita ko pa sila nang

maayos. They were both smiling. Nagkekwento ang babae habang may hawak na

plastic cup ng fishball ata or something.

Agad akong tumalikod nang makitang padaan sila sa kung nasaan ako so I started

walking towards the opposite side.

“Elyse!”

I stopped walking when I heard him call my name. Napapikit ako nang mariin at

lumingon sa kanya. He was now walking towards me, kasama ang babaeng kausap

niya kanina. The lady was in a bun. She was taller than me but still shorter

than Sevi. She smiled at me sweetly.

“Here,” inabot ko na kaagad kay Sevi ang paper bag at tinalikuran na siya.

“Wait,” he grabbed my arm lightly.

I sighed and faced him. The woman tried to look away, giving us privacy even

though I didn’t need it. Sinubukan niyang abalahin ang sarili sa pagtetext at

humarap pa sa ibang direksyon. Napaiwas lang ako ng tingin sa babae nang

sinubukang hulihin ni Sevi ang tingin ko.

“What? Nabigay ko na so aalis na ‘ko,” tinanggal ko ang hawak niya sa braso

ko.

“Kumain ka na?” He asked suddenly.

I consciously looked at the woman he was with, concluding that they already

ate together so why was he asking me about food? I raised a brow at him and

crossed my arms.

“No,” I answered truthfully.

“Tara, kain tayo,” aya niya.

“I don’t know. Diet ako, and I’m sure you’re already full,” I looked at the

woman again.

Nakita kong napasulyap siya sa’kin at agad umiwas ng tingin, naging abala sa

phone ulit. Sinundan ni Sevi ang tinitignan ko. Narinig ko bigla ang tawa niya

at humakbang pagilid para harangan ang tingin ko.

“Hindi pa ‘ko kumakain,” sambit niya.

“Do you like me?” Taas-noong tanong ko.

I heard a cough.

Napalingon ulit ako sa babae nang bigla itong mabulunan nang marinig ang

tanong ko. Sevi looked back at her and glared when she started laughing while

coughing.

“Luna,” his tone sounded like a threat.

“Sorry, sorry, eto na, papasok na ‘ko sa class ko,” the woman was still laughing.

Tumatawa pa rin ito nang tapikin si Sevi sa balikat at kumaway sa’kin bago naglakad paalis. Binalik ko ang tingin kay Sevi na seryoso na ang tingin sa’kin.

“Ano? Kain tayo?” He asked again, ignoring my question earlier.

“Okay, but just to be clear, I don’t like you,” diretsong sabi ko.

He stared at me for a moment before laughing out loud. Nawala ang matalim na

tingin ko sa kanya at napalitan ng pagtataka kung ano bang nakakatawa sa sinabi ko.

“Tangina, hahaha!” He was still laughing. Maiiyak na siya sa kakatawa.

“Bahala ka nga!” Iritang sabi ko at tinalikuran siya para makaalis na!

Nakakahiya! He was laughing at me! Nakikita pa ng mga dumadaan!

I stopped walking when he grabbed my arm again and made me face him.

“Ano?!” Singhal ko sa kanya.

He bit his lower lip, trying to prevent himself from smiling more.

“Hindi natin kailangan magustuhan ang isa’t-isa para kumain,” sambit niya.

“Kaya tara na. Gutom na ‘ko.”

:)

04

“Can we just eat somewhere else? Naiinitan ako.”

Umiling si Sevi at tumayo ulit para maglakad. Nakakailang lipat na kami and I

heard him say na we were in Dapitan. Hindi ko alam kung saan ‘yon at sumusunod

lang sa kanya. He was holding on to the straps of his backpack and he was

walking faster than me. O baka naman mahaba kasi ang legs niya kaya nauuna

siyang maglakad?

“Here na lang,” turo ko sa Wendy’s.

Tumango siya at pumasok na kami sa loob. Pumila kaagad siya at sa tabi niya

naman ako nakatayo, looking at the menu. Nilabas niya ang wallet niya at

tinignan saglit ang laman non.

“Don’t worry. I’ll pay,” I assured him.

“Kaya kong magbayad,” he countered.

“Okay, then. Pay for yours and I’ll pay for mine.”

That would be fair for the both of us. Hindi naman ‘to date so bakit namin

kailangan mag-librehan?

“Ako na oorder. Humanap ka na ng upuan,” sambit niya sa’kin.

I told him my order before going upstairs. Maraming bakante sa taas at umupo

ako roon sa may pinakagilid para walang makakita sa’kin! Nakakahiya ‘no!

Mamaya, may kakilala pala ako rito and then i-issue nanaman ako kay Sevi! Ew

lang! As much as possible, ayokong ma-issue sa kanya!

I shouldn’t be eating fastfood right now so I just ordered a salad. Maya-maya,

may naglapag na ng tray sa table at umupo sa harapan ko. He was wearing their

uniform na white polo with a logo on the side and black slacks. Binuksan niya

ang isa pang butones ng polo dahil nainitan, revealing his white shirt inside.

“Ang init,” reklamo niya at nilabas ang itim na panyo para punasan ang pawis

sa noo pagkalapag ng bag niya sa gilid.

“I told you,” I rolled my eyes.

He just smiled at me and got the food out of the tray to distribute. Nilapag

niya ang salad ko sa harapan ko, at burger sa kanya. Pagkatapos, nilagay niya

ang tray sa kabilang table. I consciously looked around, naghahanap lang ng

kakilala. Mabuti na lang at wala!

“Wala tayong drinks?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

“Sabi mo ayaw mo ng softdrinks at juice, at ayaw mo rin ng service water.

Anong oorderin ko?” Napakamot siya sa ulo niya.

“You could have bought me a bottled water or something!” Sumimangot ako.

“Walang bottled water,” sagot niya naman.

“Okay, kapag nabulunan ako at namatay, kasalanan mo!” Humalukipkip ako.

He sighed heavily before standing and getting his wallet again inside his bag.

Walang pasabi siyang bumaba ulit. Sinundan ko siya ng tingin hanggang sa

mawala siya sa paningin ko. I didn’t want to be rude so hindi pa ‘ko kumain. I

waited for him to be back.

Napatigil ang pagcecellphone ko nang may maglapag ng bottled water sa table.

Napangiti kaagad ako at hinawakan ‘yon para ilapit sa’kin. Pawis na ulit si

Sevi nang umupo sa harapan ko at nagpupunas na ulit gamit ang panyo.

“Thanks!” I smiled at him cutely.

“Kumain ka na,” he urged.

Masaya na ‘ko nang magsimulang kumain. He had his own water jug kaya hindi na

siya namili ng tubig para sa sarili niya.

“Oy, Seb!”

Sabay kaming napalingon sa grupo ng kalalakihang kakaakyat lang sa second

floor ng Wendy’s. Napahinto sila nang makita ako at nag-iba kaagad ang tingin.

Naging mapang-asar na ang mga ngiti!

“Cutting! Cutting!” Pang-aasar nung isang lalaki.

“Gago, walang prof,” tumawa si Sevi.

“O, ano? Dito pa ba tayo kakain? Lovelite na lang tayo! Baka palayasin tayo ni

master!”

Tinignan ko muli sila at nakitang pare-pareho ng uniform kaya mga kaklase niya

siguro. Napaiwas ako at bahagyang tinago ang mukha, nahihiyang may makakita

sa’kin. Mamaya, baka may magsumbong sa kuya ko!

“Saan kayo pagkatapos?” Tanong ni Sevi.

“Paci kami, master,” nakangising sabi ng isa. “Sama ka? Arat, laro muna.”

“Susunod ako,” Sevi gave them a nod.

Nagsisi-asaran at tulakan pa ang mga lalaki. May isa pang nag flying kiss sa

kanya bilang pabiro at pabirong sinalo naman ni Sevi. Napailing ako nang

mawala na ang ingay at nagsi-babaan na sila para lumipat ng kakainan.

“Sorry. Blockmates ko,” sambit niya sa’kin.

“I didn’t ask,” walang emosyong sagot ko.

Tumawa lang siya at kumagat na ulit sa burger niya. Nang malunok ko ang

lettuce na nginunguya ko kanina, tinignan ko ulit siya.

“Why do they call you master?” This time, I asked na.

“Ewan ko,” he laughed. “Napagsasabay ko raw basketball at engineering. Master

daw. Ewan ko ba, parang gago.”

“Oo nga, ‘no?” I looked up for a second. “How can you do that? You’re smart

siguro?”

“Hindi, ah!” Agad na tanggi niya, natawa pa sa sinabi ko. “Magaling lang

siguro ako sa math kaya madali kong makuha.”

“Yabang mo naman,” I could barely pass my math subjects! But I still did.

“Anong course mo?” He asked after drinking on his jug.

“Applied corporate management,” proud na sabi ko sa kanya.

“Gusto mo ba ‘yun?” Tanong niya. Napakunot ang noo ko, hindi naintindihan ang

sinabi niya. “‘Yung course. ‘Yun ba talaga gusto mo?”

“Yes, I picked the course,” I nodded.

“Buti naman,” he gave me a sincere smile.

“Why? You don’t like your course?” Curious na tanong ko.

“Gusto, kaya nga hindi ko maiwan, e, kahit pinapalipat nila ‘ko sa commerce.

Ang hirap kasi isabay ng schedule sa basketball pero ginagawan ko naman ng

paraan,” he looked really passionate.

Tumango ako at uminom ng tubig. Naubos ko na ang pagkain ko at hinihintay na

lang siyang matapos. Hindi na ‘ko nagtanong pagkatapos non. I was not that

interested naman and he did not ask me about anything din. Inubos niya na lang

ang burger niya.

“Tara,” aya niya sa’kin pagkatapos kumain.

Kinuha ko na ang bag ko at tumayo na rin siya para isuot ang bag niya sa

balikat niya. He fixed his hair a little before gesturing me to walk first.

Sumunod siya sa’kin sa likod ko hanggang sa makalabas kami.

Napahinto ako pagkalabas kaya nabunggo siya sa likod ko. Agad kong lumingon sa

kanya at sinamaan siya ng tingin. He laughed and stepped backwards to give me

space.

“I don’t know the way,” humalukipkip ako.

I was so bad with directions! Kaya nga hindi ako marunong mag-drive dahil wala

silang tiwala sa’kin pagdating sa directions. Baka kung saan-saan daw ako

mapunta.

Inalis niya ang I.D. niya at sinuot bigla sa leeg ko. Naguguluhan kong

tinignan ‘yon.

“Ayokong umikot ng Lacson,” sabi niya sa’kin.

Hinubad niya ang backpack niya para iharang kunwari sa harapan. Hinawakan ko

ang I.D. niya para pagmasdan. It was a black strap with UST Civil Engineering

on it and some logos. It was kind of unfair how he looked like himself in his

I.D. picture! Dapat pangit siya roon, ah!

“Tara,” sambit niya.

Sumunod ako sa kanya sa may gilid ng daan at tatawid na sana nang bigla niyang

hinawakan ang braso ko at hinatak ako pabalik.

“Wala pa. Masagasaan ka,” he sounded like a father!

His hand did not leave my arm hanggang sa pagtawid namin. Binitawan niya lang

ako nang makapasok na kami. Marami kaming nakakasalubong na estudyante na

palabas kaya ilang beses akong nabubunggo.

“Ouch!” I glared at the woman who bumped on my shoulder. “Hoy-”

I stopped and looked back at Sevi when he suddenly put his hand on my shoulder

to pull me closer to him.

“Hayaan mo na,” he said calmly.

I blowed on my cheek and just walked straight, kung saan niya ‘ko hinahatak

dahil nasa balikat ko ang kamay niya.

“Hoy, Sevi!”

Agad niyang tinanggal ang hawak sa balikat ko nang makasalubong namin ang isa

pang babaeng naka Archi uniform. I saw the woman during the game last time!

She smiled at him meaningfully and glanced at my shoulder for a bit.

“Ang landi landi!” The woman laughed.

“Elyse, si Kierra,” pagpapakilala ni Sevi.

“Hello!” The girl smiled sweetly and offered her hand.

She was also taller than me and her skin was darker than mine. Naka-ponytail

ang buhok niya at may hawak na illustration board sa kabilang kamay. She

somehow resembled the woman earlier, ‘yung isa pang girl ni Sevi.

“Nandoon ka sa game last time, right? And also sa game ng UST tsaka La Salle?

The cheerleader?” She asked.

“Yeah,” tinanggap ko ang kamay niya.

“Saan ka? Cutting ka, ah,” pag-aakusa ni Sevi.

“Tanga, bumili lang ako ng illus,” tinaas niya ang illustration board na hawak

niya. “Sige na, go na! Aakto na lang ako na wala akong nakita! Hahaha!”

Hindi ako makapagsalita at hiyang-hiya. She probably saw his hand on my

shoulder! Wala namang meaning pero mukhang na-issue nanaman kami! Ugh!

Hinatid niya ‘ko sa tapat ng UST Hospital, and then tinalikuran ko na siya

kaagad dahil nagmamadaling pumasok sa loob. I saw Kuya Roel seated in the

lobby, kung nasaan siya kanina. He immediately stood up when he saw me.

“Ang daming patients, grabe!” I exaggerated.

“Okay lang, Ma’am.”

I went straight to training after that dahil binaon ko naman na ang gamit ko,

iniwan ko lang sa sasakyan. It was, again, a tiring day. Gabi na ulit ako

nakauwi pero nawala ang pagod nang makitang ibang kotse ang sumundo sa’kin.

“Kuya!” Masayang sabi ko nang makapasok sa kotse.

“Seatbelt,” he reminded me before leaving the parking lot.

“Bakit ikaw? Hindi ka busy?” Nakangiting tanong ko.

Minsan lang kami magkita, e, since hindi naman siya nakatira sa bahay. He

moved out when he went to college. I could tell na matagal na niyang gustong

gawin ‘yon. We met each other for the first time when he was in high school.

His mom moved out of the house and right after that, my mom and I moved in.

May boyfriend nang iba ang Mommy niya at that time and my dad, or our dad,

basically cheated on her with my mom, the reason why they had me.

It was something I already put in the past. It was not my fault, and he never

treated me differently. He was just cold to my mom and to our dad, but he

never treated me like that. I was happy that I had him.

“Kuya Roel ran an errand for dad,” he explained. “And I was just around the

corner so I offered to pick you up. Anyway, how are you holding up?”

“I’m fine! I’m just tired,” I pouted.

“Take time to rest,” he said seriously while turning the steering wheel.

“I am!” Sabi ko, kahit palagi naman akong gumagala.

“How about school? Do you need some help in any of your subjects?” He arched a

brow.

He was intelligent. He was more intelligent than me. During college, he spent

most of his time partying and hooking up with girls, but he still passed his

subjects! Mataas pa ang grades niya! Hindi ko alam kung paano niya nagagawa

‘yon. I actually thought he would fail. Halos araw-araw sila nila Hiro!

He was more serious now, though. Hindi na siya masyadong umaalis, I guess

dahil wala na si Hiro so wala na rin siyang kasama mag-party.. or baka hindi

ko lang talaga alam na umaalis siya? Â Whatever.

“I’m fine. I’m passing so far,” I laughed.

“Just don’t forget to enjoy. I know college is hard so don’t make it even

harder. Take some time off your acads to rest. Don’t just take care of your

grades, but also take care of yourself.”

What the hell, coming from him, ah! Tumawa tuloy ako para asarin siya, pero

tumango rin. May point naman siya, e!

“Why are you being so serious right now?” I teased him.

“Seryoso naman ako, ah?” He chuckled.

“Babae nga hindi mo maseryoso, e!”

Natahimik siya sa sinabi ko at bahagyang napakamot sa tungki ng ilong, getting

uncomfortable. Napataas ang kilay ko at siningkitan siya ng mata.

“Don’t tell me you already have someone-”

“Have you eaten dinner?” He cut me off.

I knew he was changing the topic so I did not ask about it anymore. Tumango

lang ako kaya diniretso niya na ‘ko pauwi. Na-curious tuloy ako sa lovelife

niya! Malalaman ko rin ‘yan!

After showering and doing my skincare, humiga na ulit ako sa bed ko at nag-

scroll sa phone. Napapairap na lang ako kapag dumadaan ang IG story ng mga

hindi ko gustong tao pero finofollow pa rin because they followed me first,

and I did not like having beef with these people. Some of them were ex-flings

or ex-girlfriends ni Hiro. Nakakairita makita!

I checked Sevi’s profile to follow him, but changed my mind when I scrolled

over his posts and saw his picture with the woman he was with earlier, ‘yung

kumakain ng fishball. She had her arms over his neck so nahahatak siya pababa

even though he was tall. They were both wearing Harry potter costumes.

Nakatapat ang stick ni Sevi sa camera at nakangisi.

sevirous: feelings? deletrius! xD

My mouth formed an ‘o’ when the puzzle inside my head was slowly getting

solved. Now everything made sense! He liked her? Or until now? I don’t know. I

checked the comments.

lunavaleria: obliviate hahaha

sevirous: tag ko na?

lunavaleria: medyo ulol ka sa part na ‘yan pero sige pagbibigyan kita pasampal

lang tatlo up and down

Or was he talking about deleting the feelings of the woman dahil heartbroken

sa ibang guy? I was starting to get confused.

“Oh my god!”

I fucking clicked the heart button!

“Oh my god, oh my god,” napaupo kaagad ako at sinubukang bawiin ang napindot

kong heart. Bumilis kaagad tibok ng puso ko sa sobrang kaba!

He wouldn’t see it right? Kasi binawi ko na ‘yung heart!

“Right,” kinalma ko ang sarili ko at humiga na ulit sa kama ko.

Mabilis akong napaupo ulit nang tumunog ang phone ko!

sevirous: nays wan stalker xD

“Fuuuuck,” sinuntok-suntok ko ang unan sa sobrang frustration!

Nakailang inhale-exhale ako para pakalmahin ang sarili ko bago ako nag-type

ulit para mag-reply sa kanya. Medyo matagal ko ring pinag-isipan ang

ipapalusot ko!

elydezma: I think my phone was hacked.

sevirous: pakisabi sa hacker mo, kung ililike niya pictures ko, ifollow niya

na rin ako!

elydezma: Maybe it was Ida. Naka-open account ko sa iPad niya, e.

Oh my god, I’m so sorry, Fraida.

sevirous: ikaw ‘yung ‘galing’ sa ‘sinungaling’

“What the fuck?!” Mahigpit kong hinawakan ang unan, parang mapupunit ko na.

elydezma: Bakit ko naman ila-like picture mo with your girl

sevirous: bakit mo alam alin ‘yung ni-like

Oh my god, I want to bang my head against the wall! Why did I say that?! Oh my

god, para akong humukay ng sarili kong libingan!

sevirous: at hindi ko ‘yun babae

elydezma: Idc

Pinatay ko na ang phone ko pagkatapos non para wala na ‘kong masabing mas

nakakahiya pa.

The next day was a Saturday so may training ulit kami like the usual, until

Sunday came again. I decided to relax, buy books and read them in a coffee

shop or something, but first, I went to the gym.

I was already expecting Sevi to be there. Tama nga ako dahil pagkapasok ko,

naroon na siya, nakaupo at kausap si Arkin na nakatayo sa harapan niya. Some

women inside would sneak a picture of Arkin. Of course, artista.

Tahimik akong dumiretso sa bench at nilapag ang duffel bag ko roon. I was

wearing my black leggings and pink sports bra. Habang nag-iipit ako ng buhok,

napatingin ako sa gawi nila Arkin. Sevi was fixing his gloves, nodding to

whatever Arkin was saying.

Sevi was wearing a dark blue Nike shirt and black shorts partnered with his

black shoes. The Nike shirt hugged his body perfectly, showing his broad chest

and shoulders, pati ang braso. I looked away when he turned his gaze into my

direction.

Dahil napatingin siya sa gawi ko, napalingon din si Arkin.

“Eli? What’s up?! Dito ka rin nag-gygym?” Arkin waved at me.

“Obvious ba?” Tinaasan ko siya ng kilay.

Tumawa siya lalo na nang lagpasan ko siya para mag-warm up sa mat. Paminsan-

minsan, napapatingin ako sa gawi nilang dalawa. Arkin would suddenly stop in

between his exercise to take a photo with his fans habang si Sevi ay walang

pakialam. He was lifting himself up, nakahawak lang sa isang mataas na bar.

I did some squats first while holding a dumbbell, and then some leg lounges.

“Hi, madalas ka rito?”

I stopped doing my exercise when a man suddenly approached me. He was smiling

nervously and obviously trying to shoot his shot.

“Paki mo?” Malditang sagot ko at bumalik na sa ginagawa.

“Ang sungit mo naman!” Sumimangot kaagad siya. “Hindi ka naman sobrang ganda!”

Napatigil ako at hindi-makapaniwalang binalik ang tingin ko sa kanya. I picked

the dumbbell on the floor and stepped closer to him so I could hit him with

it, but he ran away.

“Fuck you, pangit!” Sigaw ko sa kanya.

I heard Sevi’s laugh kaya sinamaan ko siya ng tingin.

Kuya Roel immediately escorted him outside the gym. Dapat kanina niya pa

ginawa ‘yon, pero hindi naman niya alam na hindi ko kakilala ‘yun kaya okay

lang. Nakasimangot na tuloy ako habang nagsi-sit ups.

“Badtrip ka?”

Lumingon ako kay Sevi. He was already seated on the bench near the mat,

watching me do sit-ups. Huminto ako at hingal na hinarap siya, pawis pa ang

noo.

“Oo, and mas nabadtrip ako sa mukha mo,” I rolled my eyes.

He laughed again, obviously not taking me seriously.

“Do you know him?” I asked. “The guy? Madalas ka rito, ah?”

“Hindi,” umiling siya. “Bago ata ‘yun dito, e. Bakit? Bugbugin ko ba?”

Napanguso ako para pigilan ang ngiti ko dahil sa sinabi niya. Kinuha ko ang

tubig ko sa gilid para uminom at pagkatapos, pinunasan ang sarili gamit ang

towel.

“Hindi raw ako sobrang ganda?! After approaching me like that?! Men and their

fragile ego! My god!” Pagra-rant ko. “Well, kung hindi ako maganda, ano pa

siya?! He’s so ugly! He looked like a fucking broccoli!”

“Maganda ka naman, ah?” Kumunot ang noo ni Sevi.

Napatigil ako bigla sa pagsasalita at matagal na napatingin sa kanya. Nawala

tuloy ang inis ko dahil sa sinabi niya! He bit his lower lip to stop himself

from smiling.

“Yie, kinilig,” he teased.

“Ew!” Inismiran ko siya at bumalik na sa pagkakahiga sa mat.

I heard his laugh again. Nang i-angat ko muli ang katawan ko, naglalakad na

siya paalis habang umiinom ng tubig. Napatigil lang siya nang tawagin siya ni

Arkin.

After doing some push-ups, nag-cool down na ‘ko at nag-shower pagkatapos.

Nakasuot na ‘ko ngayon ng white tank top, mom jeans, and white sneakers. I

also wore my Gucci belt so the pants won’t go down. It did not fit my waist.

Pagkalabas ko ng shower room, nakaligo at bihis na rin si Sevi at Arkin. Sevi

was wearing a striped shirt, black pants, and his black sneakers. Napatingin

siya sa’kin nang makita akong lumabas.

“Eli, breakfast daw kayo sabi ni Sevi!” Sigaw ni Arkin.

“Huh?” Napalingon sa kanya si Sevi sa gulat.

Inambahan ko ng suntok si Arkin dahil halatang nantitrip! Hindi ko na lang

siya pinansin at inayos na ang gamit ko sa duffel bag.

“Just go ask her,” rinig kong bulong ni Arkin.

“Ano? Bakit?” Bulong din ni Sevi. “Sabi mo tayo ang sabay magbe-breakfast,

gago, bakit naiba na?”

“May schedule ako bigla, pre,” tumawa si Arkin.

“Are you guys whispering? Kasi rinig na rinig ko, e,” inis akong lumingon sa

kanilang dalawa.

Arkin laughed and Sevi rolled his eyes at him. Parang tanga ‘tong dalawang

‘to! I really did not understand how they became bestfriends!

“Eli, samahan mo naman mag breakfast ‘tong tropa ko, kawawa naman, e,” umakbay

si Arkin kay Sevi at ngumisi.

“Ulol,” tinanggal ni Sevi ang akbay niya at tinalikuran kami.

“Pakipot lang ‘yan, Eli, pero kanina pa siya nagpa-practice kung paano ka niya

aayain mag-breakfast. Believe me!”

Arkin was obviously trying to gago me or something.

“I’m on my way to Starbucks,” sambit ko.

“Tamang-tama! Doon din papunta si Sevi! Sabay na kayo!” Tinulak ni Arkin ang

tropa niya.

“Gago ka ba? Sinasabi mo?” Nagsalubong na ang kilay ni Sevi.

Malakas na tumawa si Arkin at dali-daling kinuha ang gamit nang mag-ring ang

phone. Kumaway siya sa aming dalawa at tumakbo na palabas dahil sinundo na ng

itim niyang artista van.

Sinabit ko na sa balikat ko ang duffel bag at lumingon kay Sevi.

“Ano? Do you want to come with me?” I raised a brow.

He looked stunned with my question. I saw him hesitate for a bit before

getting his backpack and nodding.

Hindi na nagtanong si Kuya Roel kung bakit may kasama na ‘ko bigla sa

sasakyan. Sevi looked conscious, though, because Kuya Roel was giving him

glances through the mirror in front.

“Hindi ba niya ‘ko babarilin bigla?” Sevi whispered on me.

I laughed at him and his nervous face.

“Hindi ka sure,” I mocked him.

Nakahinga lang siya nang maluwag nang ibaba na kami sa malapit na mall kung

saan may Starbucks. I told Kuya Roel to look around first and I'll just text

him kapag magpapasundo na 'ko.

"Bibili muna ako ng books," I told Sevi.

Tumango lang siya at sinamahan ako papasok sa bookstore. Nakasunod siya sa

likod ko habang naghahanap ako ng mga babasahin sa fiction section. When I

noticed that he was not following me anymore, I looked over my shoulder and

saw him flipping through the pages of a Harry Potter book.

"You like reading?" I asked him.

"Kapag may time," sagot niya at binalik ang libro sa shelf.

"Sevirous.. Snape?" I asked him about his username.

"Oo, binansag sa'kin ng mga kaibigan ko kasi mahilig daw ako sa Harry Potter

at seryosong-seryoso daw ako kapag nagbabasa. Corny amputa," tumawa siya at

umiling.

"Really? Not because you're like Snape? In love with a woman who couldn't give

your love back?" I smirked.

Napataas ang kilay niya sa sinabi ko at tumitig sa'kin.

"Anong ibig mong sabihin?" He looked confused.

“It’s okay! I also like someone who couldn’t like me back!”

Napabalik ang tingin niya sa’kin habang nakahawak sa isang librong kakakuha

lang. I sighed and gave him a sad smile.

“Bakit hindi ka niya gusto?” He asked out of curiosity.

“Apparently, I’m too young for him daw and he’s also friends with my brother.

He loves another woman now so it’s fine,” I shrugged.

“Oo nga, bata ka pa nga,” he nodded.

Agad nag-init ang ulo ko at hinampas sa kanya ang librong hawak ko. He laughed

and held his right arm, kung saan ko siya hinampas.

“So I’m also too young for you, huh?” Paghahamon ko.

“Hmm,” he licked his lower lip a little and looked up, acting like he was

thinking.

“It’s okay. You’re not my type,” tinalikuran ko na siya.

Naglakad ako papunta sa likod ng shelf para roon maghanap ng libro. Kumuha ako

ng dalawa at binitbit ‘yon sa may braso ko. He followed me, smiling like I

said something amusing.

“Ano? Why are you smiling?” Inis na tanong ko sa kanya.

“You’re..” Hindi niya matuloy ang sasabihin niya.

“I’m what?!” I snapped at him.

Inabot niya sa’kin ang librong hawak niya. Padabog kong kinuha sa kamay niya

‘yon at binaliktad para mabasa ang title.

‘Just My Type’

A book by Simon Garfield.

I bit the insides of my cheek to stop myself from smiling. I still tried to

look serious and gave the book back to him aggressively. He was smiling now,

also laughing a little.

Napangisi ako nang makita ang librong hinahanap ko sa kabilang shelf. Binigay

ko kaagad sa kanya ‘yon at tinalikuran siya.

I heard his loud laugh when he read the title.

‘Don’t Fall’

:)

05

“My treat! Anong order mo?”

Nakatingin sa menu si Sevi at mukhang nag-iisip kung ano ang oorderin niya.

Ako, alam ko na kaagad ang akin kaya hindi ko na kailangang mag-isip pa. He

was holding a paper bag of the books I bought. Siya naman ang nag-prisintang

magbuhat non, e.

“Hindi ako mahilig sa kape,” sabi niya sa’kin.

“Tea na lang. I’ll order for you,” sambit ko sa kanya.

Tumango siya at nanatili sa tabi ko hanggang sa maka-order na ‘ko. Napakunot

ang noo ko nang makitang pasulyap-sulyap ang babae sa cashier kaya sinundan ko

ang tinitignan niya. Sevi was looking at his phone, typing something.

“Name po, Ma’am?” The woman asked.

“Elyse. E-L-Y-S-E not Elisse with double s,” sabi ko na parang kinabisa na sa

dalas kong sabihin ‘yon sa mga nanghihingi ng pangalan ko sa coffee shop.

“Si Sir po? Anong name?” She asked, smiling.

“Sev-”

“Name ko na lang din ilagay mo,” singit ko.

Sevi arched a brow and looked at me when I suddenly cut him off. Hindi ko siya

pinansin at inabot na ang Starbucks card ko.

“Sevi,” pagpupumilit ni Sevi.

“Okay, Sir,” the woman giggled as she wrote on the cup.

Pagkatapos niya ibalik ang card ko, naghanap na kami ng upuan. Magkatapat

nanaman kami ngayon. Nakatingin ako sa labas habang siya ay tinitignan ang mga

librong binili ko. Hindi ko inaakalang mahilig siyang magbasa. I felt like

wala naman siyang time for it.

“Ma’am Elyse!” Tumayo kaagad ako para kuhanin ang akin, pati ang inorder kong

ensaymada.

Pagkabalik ko sa table, tinawag na rin si Sevi. Nilapag niya ang pagkain

niyang french toast sa mesa, pati ang green tea na inorder ko para sa kanya

bago niya binalik ang tray naming dalawa sa counter.

Kinuha ko ang cup niya nang mapansin ang nakasulat doon.

‘Sevi

Have a good day! <3′

Hindi ako makapaniwalang tumingin sa cup ko na pangalan ko lang ang nakalagay.

Wala man lang smiley face or heart! Just my name! Oh my god, may favoritism

ang mga tao rito!

“Anong tinitignan mo? Gusto mo?” Tanong ni Sevi pagkaupo ulit sa harapan ko.

Binalik ko ang inumin niya sa mesa at hindi sinagot ang tanong niya. Nag-hiwa

na lang ako ng ensaymada ko. Ang dami talagang privileges ng mga lalaki, lalo

na kapag gwapo! Napairap ako lalo.

“Where do you live?” I asked. Sa sobrang dalas niya sa gym na ‘yon, pakiramdam

ko malapit lang ang bahay nila.

Napatigil siya sa pag-inom sa straw at nanlaki ang mga mata. Dahan-dahan

niyang binaba ang cup sa mesa at nagpakawala ng mabigat na buntong-hininga.

“Hindi pa ‘ko ready sa ganito,” he dramatically said. “Masyado pang maaga para

sa meet the family!”

“What?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

“Elyse, ano, kasi ganito ‘yon,” Sevi sighed again and leaned over the table.

“Hindi ko alam kung paano ko ipapaliwanag sa’yo.. Hindi pa ‘ko handang maging

ganoon ka-open-”

“What the fuck,” singhal ko kaagad sa kanya. “You’re so feeling! I was just

wondering if you live near the gym!”

“Ahh,” tumango siya, tumatawa. “Linawin mo kasi. Muntik ko nang isiping may

gusto ka sa’kin, e.”

“Nag-iisip ka pala?” Malditang sagot ko.

“Ngayon ko lang din nalaman,” he chuckled.

Hindi ko alam kung gusto niya ba ‘yung drink na binili ko para sa kanya or

napipilitan lang siyang ubusin dahil ako ang nagbayad non. Mukha namang wala

siyang reaksyon habang umiinom at kumakain.

“Does it taste okay?” I asked him, worried about the drink.

“Okay lang. Lasang dahon,” he laughed.

“I can get you another drink,” tumayo ako, handa nang pumunta sa counter.

I stopped when he suddenly held my hand. Napalingon kaagad ako sa kanya at

agad bumaba ang tingin sa kamay niyang nakahawak sa kamay ko.

“Huwag na,” binitawan niya kaagad ako nang mapansin ang ginawa.

“Uh, okay,” I awkwardly took my seat again.

Hindi na ‘ko makatingin sa kanya hanggang sa matapos akong kumain. Tumayo siya

para iligpit ang plato habang ako naman, kumuha ng libro sa paper bag para

magsimulang magbasa ng kung ano.

“Maganda ‘yan. Nakakaiyak,” umupo ulit si Sevi sa harapan ko.

“You cried reading this?” Tinaas ko ang libro.

“Hindi. Si Luna-”

He suddenly stopped talking when I raised a brow. He gave me a smile and just

drank on his green tea, acting like he did not say anything.

Luna, huh? Close na close ata sila, judging by their pictures. Kahapon din

nakita ko sa IG story niya na magkasama sila. I could tell that he was in love

with her.. or baka hanggang ngayon? I don’t know and I should not care.

“I don’t want to read now. I want to go shopping,” I closed the book and

looked at him straight in the eyes.

“Ganoon ba? Sige, samahan na kita.”

I wasn’t asking him to come with me. I actually thought na uuwi na siya kapag

sinabi ko ‘yon! Kabaliktaran ang nangyari! He carried the paper bag again, at

sa isang kamay ay hawak niya ang Starbucks cup. He was so tall than when he

stood up and got his things, he caught the attention of the people inside. Or

maybe it was not because of his height?

Or wait, baka ako ang tinitignan! Gosh!

Sinuot ko ang shades ko at kinuha rin ang frappuccino kong hindi pa nauubos.

Pagkatapos, nauna na ‘kong lumabas, not minding the people looking. Sevi

followed me from behind, and also opened the door for me.

He did not say anything. Sumunod lang siya sa'kin sa other side ng mall kung

nasaan ang designer brands. I called Daddy first, of course! Ayokong

masermunan ulit sa bahay!

"Daddy, nasa mall ako," I informed him.

[I know. Your bodyguard texted me. Bakit hindi mo siya kasama?]

"I gave him free time to look around, baka pagod na siya, you know,"

pagpapalusot ko. "Anyway, I have this.. bag.. that I really want to buy.."

[I know where this is going.] I heard him sigh.

"Thank you, Daddy," sabi ko kahit hindi pa naman pumapayag.

[If you want that bag, sell some of your old ones.]

My lips parted immediately! Napatigil ako sa paglalakad kaya nabunggo nanaman

si Sevi sa likod ko. I blinked twice, trying to process what he just said.

"W-why should I do that?" I was so confused.

[Because I said so.] His voice was stern.

"B-but.. I.."

Hindi ako makapagsalita. Pumasok na sa isip ko ang mga bag ko sa shelf,

iniisip kung alin doon ang hindi ko na ginagamit at pwede nang ibenta, pero

parang lahat ayaw kong pakawalan! May mga hindi ako ginagamit pero malay mo

magamit ko siya sa future! It stressed me out!

“Okay, I won’t.. buy the bag,” I was so sad. “But I can buy new clothes,

right? Clothes! I can sell my old clothes! Huwag lang ‘yung bag, Daddy,”

pagmamakaawa ko.

[Okay, then. I’ll ask your mom to gather your old clothes so we can sell

them.]

“No! Let me pick!” I panicked.

[Just go home early. Take care.]

At binabaan na niya ‘ko ng phone!

Matagal akong nakatulala sa gitna ng mall, iniisip kung ano bang deal ‘tong

pinasok ko! It was too much for me. Nag-18 lang ako, pakiramdam ko 34 na ‘ko!

“Okay ka lang?” Sevi asked, worried.

“I hate being 18!” Pagra-rant ko sa kanya.

“Bakit?” His brows furrowed.

“So many responsibilities! So many adult things! I don’t want them!”

Tinaas ko ang shades ko hanggang sa ulo at padabog na naglakad ulit papunta sa

bilihan ng damit. Kulang na lang ay bigyan na nila ‘ko ng budget, kunwari

hanggang ganito lang dapat ang bibilhin ko. Oh my god, baka maisip nila ‘yun,

ah?!

“Hindi ka habang-buhay magiging bata,” sambit ni Sevi habang naglalakad kami.

“Darating ang araw na hindi ka na susuportahan ng magulang mo kaya kailangan

mong matuto harapin ang mundo mag-isa.”

“I don’t need a lecture right now,” I rolled my eyes.

“Hay,” he sighed. “Pribilehiyo nga naman.”

“What now?”

“Nag-aalala ka dyan? May mga biktima ng bagyo. Doon ka mag-alala. Narinig kong

balak mong ibenta mga damit mo, at sinong bibili? Mayayaman din naman. Kayo-

kayo lang ang nagtutulungan,” he shrugged.

“What are you implying?” Naguguluhang tanong ko.

“Wala naman. Sinasabi ko lang.”

I glared at him and he just gave me a fake smile. Tinalikuran ko siya kaagad

at pumasok na sa loob ng clothing store na favorite ko. I was more careful now

in choosing, iniisip na bawat kuha ko, ganoon din ang bilang ng mawawala sa

cabinet ko!

“It’s okay. Nagamit ko na ‘yun. Maliit na sa’kin mga ‘yon,” bulong ko,

consoling myself.

“Kausap mo dyan?” Sevi raised a brow.

Hindi ko siya pinansin at tinalikuran ulit para pumunta sa kabilang side ng

store. Bumuntong-hininga siya at naupo na lang sa itim na couch doon. Even the

couch screamed elegance. Para siyang haring nakaupo sa trono niya.

Nakita kong may nilabas siyang libro mula sa paper bag at binuklat ‘yon para

basahin saglit habang naghihintay. Umirap ako at binalik na ang tingin sa mga

damit. I got myself a red cropped top jacket, some sleeveless tops, and two

leather skirts.

Pumasok ako saglit sa fitting room para sukatin ‘yon. Paglabas ko, nakita kong

may kausap nang babae si Sevi!

Sumingkit ang mga mata ko nang makilala ang babae. It was a socialite. Her

name was.. I believe it was Stephanie. I knew her because ex-fling siya ni

Hiro.

Naglakad ako palapit para marinig ang pinag-uusapan nila. Sevi glanced at me

when he saw me walking towards them. Tumayo kaagad siya, inaakalang tapos na

‘ko. Stephanie’s gaze turned to me.

“Elyse!” Gulat na sabi niya. “I haven’t seen you for a very long time!”

“Yes, maybe because I don’t have any reason to show myself to you,” I gave her

a fake smile.

Nagulat si Sevi sa paraan ng pakikipag-usap ko, habang si Stephanie ay

napangiti lang sa’kin, sanay na sa ganoong attitude ko.

I have always hated her because she used to spread rumors about Hiro! Ang sabi

niya, nag-sex daw sila sa condo niya at pinakilala na raw siya sa parents!

They weren’t true, but Hiro still chose not to act on it! He was just that

nice. Ugh, I actually miss him, not because I like him but because he was also

a nice friend.

“Pick one,” tinaas ko ang dalawang hanger ng skirt at pinakita kay Sevi.

“Oh, you guys know each other?” Stephanie asked, curious.

“Yes, what about it?” I raised a brow.

“Lovely. If only I knew na may friend kang ganito, minessage na sana kita para

ipakilala ako sa kanya! My god, I heard basketball player siya. Mukhang

madalas na ‘ko sa arena,” she joked.

“We’re not friends,” I made that clear.

“Ako ba or kayo?” She asked, confused.

Bumaling ako kay Sevi at binaba na ang kamay ko, nangangawit sa pagtaas ng

dalawang hanger. He pursed his lips, not wanting to talk.

“Both,” walang emosyong sagot ko.

“Well, then. I’ll see you around. Sevi, you can message me anytime,” she

winked at him before walking away, carrying four designer paper bags.

Nairita kaagad ako sa kanya! Tumalikod kaagad ako at dumiretso na sa cashier

para bayaran lahat. I gave the woman my card and just waited. Naramdaman kong

nakatayo sa gilid ko si Sevi, but I refused to look back at him.

“‘Yung red skirt. Mas bagay sa’yo,” maingat na sabi niya.

“Binayaran ko na, can’t you see? Kanina pa kita pinapili, tapos ngayon ka

sasagot kapag nabayaran na?” I said without looking at him.

“Sorry, may kausap ka pa kasi kanina,” he was so calm.

“Ikaw din naman may kausap noong lumapit ako. You could have answered agad,

right?” Hindi ko na rin alam kung ano ba ang pinaglalaban ko.

“Nilapitan niya ‘ko. Sabi niya favorite book niya raw ‘yung binabasa ko, e,”

napakamot siya sa ulo niya. “Tapos tinanong na niya pangalan ko-”

“I did not ask,” I scoffed.

Inabot na sa’kin ng babae ang card ko at paper bag. Bago ko pa makuha sa kamay

niya, si Sevi na ang nanguna. Napairap ako at nilagay na lang ang card sa loob

ng wallet ko bago lumabas, hindi na siya hinintay pa.

“Galit ka ba?” Nagtatakang tanong niya pagkasunod sa’kin.

“No,” I denied so fast.

“Bakit hindi mo ‘ko tinitignan?”

Inis akong lumingon sa kanya at tinignan siya saglit, bago tumalikod ulit.

“Ayan, tinignan na kita. Kailangan ba tignan kita palagi?!”

Naglakad na ‘ko ulit at sumunod nanaman siya sa’kin. Wala masyadong tao sa

part na ‘to ng mall dahil puro designer brands, at tsaka maaga pa. Halos

kakabukas lang ng mall noong pumasok kami sa bookstore.

“Wait lang nga,” he grabbed my arm lightly.

Huminga ako nang malalim bago siya lingunin. Nakakunot na ang noo niya pero

kalmado pa rin ang hawak sa’kin.

May kinuha siya sa bulsa niya at inabot sa’kin. Nagtataka kong tinignan ‘yon

at nakita ang calling card ni Stephanie. Natawa ako bigla nang sarkastiko.

Bakit niya binibigay sa'kin?!

"What would I do with this?" I asked him.

"Ewan ko. Punitin mo kung gusto mo," he shrugged.

"This is yours," binalik ko sa kanya. "Ikaw magpunit kung gusto mo. I don't

care what you'll do with it. I just-"

Napatigil ako nang kuhanin niya 'yon sa kamay ko at pinunit nga sa harapan ko.

I blinked twice, watching him throw the pieces of paper in the trash can

nearby.

Nang bumalik siya sa harapan ko, seryoso na ang mukha niya. Natakot tuloy ako!

He pursed his lips and gestured me to continue walking so I did.

"Uhm.. Tapos na 'kong bumili," lumingon ako sa kanya. "Umuwi ka na."

"Nasaan na bodyguard mo?" Kalmadong tanong niya sa'kin.

"I'll call him. Uwi ka na," pagpupumilit ko.

Tumango siya at umuwi na nga pagkatapos non. Ako rin ay umuwi na. Pagkauwi ko,

nakita kong nilalagay na sa box ang mga lumang damit ko. Napasimangot ako at

lumapit doon para tignan kung may nasamang gusto ko.

“No, Mommy! Not this one!” Tinaas ko ang regalong jacket ni Hiro sa’kin.

“Maliit na sa’yo ‘yan, right?” Nagtatakang sabi ni Mommy.

“Yes, but this is important!”

Inalis ko ‘yon mula sa box at naghalungkat ulit. Inalis ko ang bigay nila

Kuya, Ate Ericka, Ate Helen, at iba pang kaibigan. Kahit hindi ko naman na

ginagamit, they had a sentimental value. I like holding on to things like

that.

“Are you going to sell them?” I asked.

“Yes, why, anak? Ayaw mo ba?” She asked.

Natahimik ako at tinignan ang dalawang box. Ang iba ay binubuhat pa ng helpers

namin pababa ng hagdan.

“There was a.. recent calamity, right?” I asked, remembering what Sevi said.

“Yes?”

“Maybe we can just donate these instead of selling?”

My mom smiled widely and ruffled my hair before kissing my forehead. Nagtaka

tuloy ako! She was so in awe!

“You’re really growing now,” she was proud.

It was not my idea, though, so I should not get the credit. I mean, his words

struck me, too. Ngayon ko lang din na-realize.

“I’ll just go to my room and help with the clothes,” paalam ko.

The next day was a Monday so I attended my class in the morning. Nakaupo lang

ako at nakikinig sa prof. Ang cellphone ay nakatago sa notebook ko kaya hindi

ko napansin ang pag-ilaw non.

“Ida, don’t sleep,” kinurot ko siya sa bewang nang makitang papikit na siya.

“Sleep!” Gulat na sigaw niya.

Napalingon ang lahat sa kanya at ang iba nag-tawanan pa. I bit my lower lip to

contain my laugh. Masama siyang tinignan ng prof pero tumalikod din para

ipagpatuloy ang pagsusulat sa board.

Napailing ako at binuksan ang notebook ko. My brows furrowed when I saw a

message.

sevirous: na-late ako sa klase.

Huh? E, ano naman sa’kin?

elydezma: So? Share mo lang?

Maingat kong binalik ang tingin sa prof ko, natatakot na baka mapansin niyang

nagce-cellphone ako pero nakatalikod pa rin naman siya kaya binaba ko na ulit

ang tingin sa phone.

sevirous: tanungin mo kung bakit

elydezma: Bakit?

Nagpauto naman ako. Baka ang i-reply niya ‘pwet mo may rakit’! That was so

like him!

sevirous: hindi ako pinapasok sa gate.

elydezma: And why are you telling me that?

sevirous: tanungin mo ulit kung bakit hahaha

elydezma: Bakit?!

Napipikon na ‘ko, ha!

sevirous: kasi nasayo id ko

My eyes widened and closed my notebook again to look around. Nakikinig na si

Ida sa prof namin at mukhang wala namang pakialam ang iba. My mouth formed an

‘o’ when I realized what he meant.

Right! ‘Yung I.D! What the hell! Nakalimutan ko! Bakit ngayon niya lang

sinabi?!

Oh my gosh, wait. I think nalagay ko ‘yun sa bag ko! I just grabbed two laces

dahil nagmamadali kanina! Naguluhan ako saglit kung alin doon ang I.D. ko.

“Dismissed,” napatingin ako sa prof namin nang magligpit na siya ng gamit.

Nagmamadali akong tumayo at kinuha ang bag ko para ipatong sa chair.

Napatingin ulit ako sa sahig nang may malaglag doon.

I was about to pick it up pero naunahan ako ni Ida!

“Bakit nasa’yo I.D. nung captain ng UST?!” Gulat na tanong niya sa’kin.

Napaawang ang labi ko at napatingin din ang iba naming blockmates. Nagsimula

na silang mag-kantyawan! Inagaw ko kaagad ang I.D. at tinago sa bag ko.

“Napulot ko!” Pagpapalusot ko.

“Elyse, ah! Animo tayo!” Pang-aasar ni Bianca.

“Archer, hindi Tiger,” tumawa si Eric.

“Shut up, guys. Napulot ko lang ‘yan!”

“Kaya pala nakita ka raw ng friend ko sa UST last time?” Ngumisi si Bea.

“That’s not me!” Tanggi ko ulit.

Kinuha ko kaagad ang bag ko at nilagay sa balikat ko para makaalis na dahil

may training pa. I glared at Ida who was laughing so hard, ineenjoy na ma-

hotseat ako. I still waved my hands at her before leaving the room.

Hindi ako makakaalis dahil may training kaya hindi ko alam kung paano ko

ibabalik sa kanya ang I.D. niya!

elydezma: May training ako. If you can wait until 11 PM, then it’s fine. I can

go to you.

“Eli! Anong ginagawa mo dyan? Walang training sabi ni coach,” nakasalubong ko

si Ate Raya.

“Huh?!” Gulat na tanong ko.

I checked the group chat. Wala nga! Bakit hindi ko nabasa kanina?!

“Okay, thank you!”

Nag-chat na ulit ako.

elydezma: Nvm I’m on my way.

sevirous: may training kami chat ka na lang kapag nandito ka na hahaha

I asked Kuya Roel to drive me to UST hospital first. Ang sabi ko, may kukuhanin akong result ng test. He did not ask about it further.

I was wearing a pair of black leggings, and a white v-neck shirt. Akala ko kasi may training kaya ito ang suot ko. Pinonytail ko na lang ang buhok ko dahil sa init, and then I put on some powder and lip tint so I wouldn’t look pale.

“I’ll be fast. You can just wait in the car,” sambit ko.

“Pero-”

“Dyan lang ako sa hospital, Kuya! Don’t worry!” I lied again.

Nakumbinsi ko rin siyang manatili na lang sa kotse. Dali-dali kong nilabas ang

phone ko para mag-chat habang naglalakad, hinahanap kung saang court sila

nagte-training. Around 4:30 pa lang nang makarating ako kaya marami pang mga

studyanteng naglalaro sa nakita kong covered courts.

elydezma: I’m here na. Nakaupo ako sa wooden bench near covered court, katabi

nung yellow na building? Idk.

He did not reply. Nagte-training, probably. Naghintay na lang ako rito at nag-

scroll sa social media.

“Elyse?” Napatingin ako sa babaeng tumawag sa’kin.

Kumunot ang noo ko nang makita ang friend ni Sevi. Kierra ata? ‘Yung

pinakilala niya last time. She was wearing her uniform, at may dalang

cartolina. She looked stressed.

“Bakit mag-isa ka?”

“I’m waiting for Sevi,” diretsong sagot ko.

“Ahh, nagte-training pa nga ata. Abangan mo na lang siya roon sa steps!” Turo

niya sa hagdanan ng yellow na building.

Tumayo ako at sumunod nga sa kanya. Hinatid niya lang ako roon at nagmamadali

nang umalis dahil may bibilhin pa raw. I sat on the steps, watching the

students come and go. May mga nagpa-practice ng sayaw at may mga nakatambay

lang. Nagpahalumbaba ako, nabobored na.

Napatingin ako sa phone ko nang mag-vibrate ‘yon.

sevirous: palabas na wait lang

Napasimangot ako. Ang tagal!

“Crap!” I yelled when someone held my shoulder.

Tumayo kaagad ako at muntik nang mahulog sa hagdan kung hindi lang hinawakan

ni Sevi ang braso ko para hatakin ako palapit. Nanlaki ang mata ko nang

magdikit kami. Agad akong lumayo sa kanya at umiwas ng tingin.

May dala siyang towel at mukhang kakatapos nga lang mag-training, pero tingin

ko nakapagpalit na siya ng damit dahil mabango at mukhang malinis. He damped

the towel again on his face, wiping his sweat. Naka-suot lang din siya ng

black jersey shorts na Nike, partnered with his black shoes.

“Kanina ka pa?” He asked, smiling.

“Duh!” Umirap ako.

Kinuha ko ang I.D. niya sa bag ko at inabot sa kanya. Kinuha niya ‘yon at

inikot sa kamay niya ang lace, walang balak suotin.

“Camero-”

Napalingon kami sa grupo ng kalalakihang kakalabas lang din ng building.

Napatigil sila saglit sa paglalakad at nag-kantyawan bigla! Nag-sikuhan pa at

nag ngitian!

“Yieeee,” pang-aasar nung isa.

“Tanga,” Sevi laughed.

“Sana all may sumusundo after training!” His teammate shook his head.

“May kinuha lang ako-”

“Sus, kaya pala nagmamadali matapos ‘yung training, ah! Unang-una ka pang

umalis, Captain!” Malakas silang nag-tawanan.

“Ulol,” tumawa ulit si Sevi and raised his middle finger at them.

Nag-tulakan ang mga lalaking ‘yon at agad ding umalis. Ayaw daw maka-istorbo!

Mas lalong nag-salubong ang kilay ko. My god! Na-issue nanaman kami! We should

really stop seeing each other! Bakit ba palagi na lang may naiiwan na gamit sa

isa’t-isa?!

Everyone would think that we’re dating now!

“Uuwi ka na?” Bumaling ulit si Sevi sa’kin.

“Duh? Saan pa ba ‘ko pupunta?” I raised a brow.

“Kumain ka na?”

Right. Ngayon ko lang naalalang hindi ako nakapag-lunch kanina dahil maraming

ginawa. Umiling ako kay Sevi para sagutin ang tanong niya.

“Kain tayo?” Aya niya.

Matagal ko siyang tinignan, iniisip kung papayag ba ‘ko o hindi. I was hungry,

too.. pero ayokong ma-issue sa kanya! What should I do?!

“Kung busy ka, okay lang,” he shrugged.

“Well,” I looked at the time. Wala naman akong masyadong gagawin. Isa lang ang

homework mamaya at isa rin ang quiz bukas. “Okay.”

“Kuhanin ko lang gamit ko,” paalam niya.

I waited for him outside. Pagkabalik niya, naglakad na kaming dalawa palabas

sa sinabi niyang ‘Noval’. I looked around to admire their campus. Maliit kasi

‘yung sa amin, e. Parang ang saya rito.

“Is that the church?” I pointed at the most beautiful building.

“Main building ‘yan,” he chuckled. “Doon pa sa madadaanan natin ‘yung

simbahan.”

Naglakad ulit kami at tinuro niya nga ang simbahan. He asked me if I wanted to

go in but I said next time na lang since gutom na ‘ko.

“You probably told yourself na dyan mo siya papakasalan,” I joked.

“Sino?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“Luna,” I said casually.

Napahinto siya sa paglalakad kaya napahinto rin ako at humarap sa kanya. He

raised his brows at me and crossed his arms, like he was waiting for me to

explain further why I said that.

“I just concluded,” I shrugged. “Am I wrong?”

“Concluded na?”

“You like her? Or love her?” Pagpapatuloy ko.

His lips slowly formed a smile after staring at me for a moment. He chuckled

and shook his head a little.

Sumimangot ako at tinignan siya nang masama. Bakit niya ‘ko tinatawanan?!

“I used to,” he was still smiling.

“Ngayon?” I asked again, wanting him to confirm it.

“Hindi na nga. Kulit,” he laughed and started walking again. This time,

slower.

“Weh?” I asked and placed my hands on my back, kicking the small stone in

front of me.

Narinig ko ulit ang tawa niya. Mukhang tuwang tuwa naman ata siya!

“Bakit ba tanong ka nang tanong tungkol sa kanya, e ikaw ‘yung kasama ko?”

Napalingon ako sa kanya at tumigil muli sa paglalakad. He smiled and squeezed

my face with his hand. Masama ko siyang tinignan at hinampas ang palapulsuhan

niya para tanggalin ‘yon.

“Ano ba! Susuntukin kita?!” Inambahan ko siya ng suntok.

“Crush mo ba ‘ko, ha?” He asked, teasing.

“Ew! Asa ka!” Tinulak ko siya kaagad at binitawan niya na rin ang mukha ko.

I blowed on my cheek and inhaled a large amount of air to calm myself. He

stared at me for a moment, watching me intently.

“Cute mo,” he smiled.

Nawala tuloy ang galit ko! I was stunned. I stared at him for a moment with my

lips parted. Umiwas kaagad ako ng tingin nang maramdaman ang pag-init ng

pisngi ko. Did he just call me.. cute? Like a kid? Or a puppy?!

“And so? You have a crush on me na?” Sarkastikong tanong ko.

The side of his lips rose again and formed a smirk.

“Siguro,” he shrugged.

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:)

06

“Okay lang ba sa’yo rito?”

Nauna na ‘kong umupo sa may wooden chair at nilapag ang sling bag ko sa table.

Umupo rin si Sevi sa harapan ko at nilapag ang backpack niya sa tabi niya. May

lumapit na babae at naglapag ng dalawang maliit na menu sa table.

We were in a korean restaurant. It looked fine. Hindi naman masyadong mainit

kahit puno. Maliit lang din siya at kaunti lang ang tables. A Korean music

show was playing sa television. Matagal akong nakatingin doon, pinapanood ang

grupo ng kababaihang sumasayaw.

“Anong gusto mo?” Sevi asked.

Napatingin tuloy ako sa kanya. Nang magtama ang mata namin, binaba ko na

kaagad ang tingin sa menu para makaiwas. Hindi maalis sa’kin ang sinabi niya

kanina! My gosh! Crush niya raw ako? Siguro? What kind of answer was that? Oo

o hindi lang dapat, ah!

“I’ll just have ramen and one set of this one,” I pointed at the menu.

“Ang dami,” he smiled. “Gutom ka?”

“No, takeout ‘yung kimbap,” I told him.

It’s for Kuya Roel. It must be hard waiting. I’m sure magugutom siya.

“Banana milk!” I pointed again like a child.

Nakita kong napangiti siya sa sinabi ko bago tinawag ang babae para mag-order

na. Lumingon muna ako sa malaking board sa gilid namin, sa may pader. Maraming

sulat doon and pictures of some Korean idols. Sumingkit ang mata ko nang may

mabasa sa post-it note.

I love you, Sevi! #GoTigers

Naghanap pa ‘ko sa iba. They were so many! Hindi ko alam kung bakit luminaw

bigla ang mga mata ko at natanaw lahat ng sulat sa kanya!

Sebastian Vincent Camero, crush kita. <3

Sa captain ng growling tigers, pwede bang manligaw? :)

“Sebastian, baka naman pwede kitang i-hire sa future para gumawa ng bahay

nating dalawa?” Pagbabasa ko.

“Huh?” Napalingon si Sevi sa’kin, tapos na mag-order.

Kinuha ko ang post-it note na ‘yon at pinakita sa kanya. His eyes quickly

surveyed what was written and laughed at it.

“So many! Look!” Tinuro ko pa ang iba sa kanya.

“Alam ko,” he chuckled.

Nagpahalumbaba siya, pinapanood akong basahin pa ang ibang naroon. I would

pick out some notes and show them to him. Mukhang hindi naman bago sa kanya

‘yon. He was just smiling all the time, watching me read those little love

letters.

“You’re happy?” I raised a brow at him.

“Hindi,” binawi niya ang ngiti niya at umayos ng upo.

“Why not?” Tanong ko ulit habang binabalik na ang notes sa may board.

“Puro sila salita, e. Hindi naman nila ‘ko chinachat,” he laughed.

Hindi ako natawa sa sinabi niya.

Mas sumingkit lang ang mga mata ko at tinitigan siya nang matagal. He raised

his brows at me, smiling at my reaction. He was just saved by the woman!

Naputol ang titig ko sa kanya nang ilapag na ng babae ang tubig, mga baso, at

ang banana milk ko.

“So you want them to message you?” I asked again.

“Pwede rin naman,” he shrugged. “Sayang, e. Last year ko na sa UST, wala pa

‘kong girlfriend.”

“So you want a Thomasian girlfriend?” I arched a brow.

Kinuha niya ang banana milk ko at siya na ang naglagay ng straw doon. Then, he

smoothly slid the milk across the table so it could reach me. Umirap ako at

kinuha ‘yon.

“Pwede ring Lasallian,” he smiled.

I choked on my milk.

Nawala ang ngiti ni Sevi nang umubo-ubo ako at humawak sa leeg ko dahil sa

pagkasamid. He poured water for me but I shook my head.

“I don’t..” I coughed. “..like service water.”

Hindi siya makapaniwalang bumuntong-hininga sa sinabi ko at natawa pa. Kinuha

niya ang bag niya at nilabas ang maliit na water container, saka inabot

sa’kin. Binuksan ko ‘yon at ininuminan hanggang sa mapawi ang kati sa

lalamunan ko.

“Kahit mamamatay ka na, maarte ka pa rin, ‘no?” He tilted his head a little to

the side.

“And so?” Padabog kong binalik sa kanya ang container.

“Huwag kang mag-alala, hindi ko ‘yan ininuman. Extra lang ‘yan,” kinuha niya

ang water container at binalik sa bag niya.

“Good. I’m LC kasi, e,” I rolled my eyes.

“LC?” Napakurap siya.

“Laway conscious, duh.”

Natawa siya sa sinabi ko at napailing, hindi na sumagot sa’kin. Dumating na

rin ang food namin, pati ang pina-takeout ko. He ordered a rice bowl and ramen

sa’kin. I shouldn’t be eating instant ramen right now, pero nasa harapan ko

na, e!

While I was waiting for the ramen to cool down a bit, I scrolled on my social

media. Nakita kong nakatingin siya sa phone ko kaya tinignan ko siya pabalik.

“What?” Masungit na tanong ko.

“Wala. Ayokong nagphophone kapag kumakain,” he shrugged.

Really? And why should I care about that? Etiquette, I guess? E, anong gagawin

ko?! Ang init pa ng ramen kaya hindi ko makain. Ano? Magtititigan kami?

“I-follow mo na ‘ko sa Instagram,” sabi niya bigla.

“Why would I have any interest in seeing your posts?” I argued.

“Talaga? Kaya pala nakikita kong viniview mo story ko kahit hindi mo ‘ko finofollow,” he chuckled.

Napakurap ako nang ma-realize na na-view ko nga ang story niya last time!

Hindi ko lang na-like ang picture niya, na-view ko pa ang story! Oh my god!

“That’s Ida,” palusot ko ulit.

Sorry, Ida. You need to take one for the team.

“Sige, sabihin mo kay Ida, i-follow niya na ‘ko,” tumango siya.

“And why would she do that?!”

Nagulat siya sa biglaang sigaw ko at napatigil sa pag-kain. He dramatically held his chest and looked around to check if I caught anyone’s attention.

“Sige, hindi na. Huwag ka na sumigaw,” he whispered, leaning over the table.

I made a face and just ate my ramen, hindi na siya pinansin. It was my first time eating instant ramen with egg and it tasted okay pala. Napatigil lang ako sa pag-kain nang makitang mag-ring ang phone ni Sevi na nakapatong sa table.

Kinuha niya kaagad ‘yon at sinagot.

“Oy, bakit?” He answered softly.

He turned a little to the side so I wouldn’t be offended by him, answering a

call. Nakatakip pa nang bahagya ang isang kamay malapit sa bibig.

“Nasa Noval ako, kumakain. Bakit?” Naririnig ko pa rin naman siya. “Sabihin mo

kay Luna, idadaan ko sa kanya mamaya. Sa condo niya na kami magkita.”

Napakunot ang noo ko at sinubukang ipagpatuloy ang pag-kain, kahit nacucurious

na ‘ko sa pinag-uusapan nila. Sino bang kausap niya?

“Kailangan na niya? Amp, sige. Pagkatapos ko kuma-”

“I don’t like it when people use their phone while eating,” I mocked him.

“Mamaya na, Ke. Text ko na lang siya. Bye,” mabilis na sabi niya at pinatay na

ang tawag.

He gave me an apologetic smile but I just rolled my eyes at him. I continued

eating, hindi na siya pinapansin. Napansin kong binibilisan niya ang kain niya

kaya binabagalan ko ang akin.

“May ibibigay lang ako,” paalam niya.

“Wait for me,” I said calmly.

“Uh, okay,” umayos siya ng upo.

I smirked and ate slower just to torture him. Tinitignan niya ang relo niya,

nag-aalala na sa oras.

“Ano bang ibibigay mo? Is that important?” I raised a brow, playing with my

chopsticks.

“Papers lang,” kalmadong sagot niya kahit halatang nagmamadali na.

Fine! Naawa na ‘ko sa kanya kaya binilisan ko na ang pag-kain ko. Nang

matapos, tumayo na ‘ko at sinuot ang bag ko. Kinuha ko rin ang banana milk at

nagpasyang ubusin na lang ‘yun habang naglalakad. Inabot din sa’kin ni Sevi

ang take-out ko para kay Kuya Roel.

I followed him again until he stopped walking in the middle of the busy

street. Tinanggal niya ang I.D. niya at pinasuot ulit sa’kin. I looked at it

again, nagtataka na kung bakit.

“Malayo ang Lacson,” he reasoned out again.

“And?”

“Doon ‘yung gate ng hospital. Doon lang nagpapapasok ng outsiders,” he

explained.

Hindi na ‘ko nagsalita at sumunod na lang ulit sa kanya sa likuran. He would

always look back to check if nakasunod pa ‘ko because I was so far from him.

Paano, ang haba ng legs niya tapos maliit lang ako!

“Halika nga,” he gestured.

Nang makalapit, nilagay niya ang kamay sa balikat ko at tinangay ako sa

paglalakad niya. I was shocked. Naamoy ko tuloy ang pabango niya sa sobrang

lapit niya sa’kin.

He gestured a ‘stop’ for the approaching car before crossing the street,

dragging me with him. Hindi nakatingin ang guards kaya nakapasok kaming

dalawa. After that, I stopped walking so he was forced to stop, too.

Tinanggal ko ang I.D. at binigay sa kanya. Baka makalimutan nanaman, e!

“Thanks,” he said and continued walking.

Lumiko kami at naglakad malapit sa field nila. There were benches and gazeebos

on the sidewalk. We stopped in front of the building where I could see a large

“ARKI” sign.

“Sev!” Napalingon kami sa babaeng naglalakad palapit.

It was Luna. She was still in a messy bun, wearing her archi uniform. She

looked fresh with her rosy cheeks and pink lips. She smiled wider when she saw

me.

“Hi,” she greeted me.

I just gave her a nod and a small smile, not showing my teeth. Humarap na siya

kay Sevi at sinuntok ito sa braso bigla.

“Nasaan na?” Reklamo niya.

“Teka, pucha,” sagot naman ni Sevi habang naghahalungkat sa bag.

May nilabas siyang folder at inabot kay Luna. She opened it and flipped

through the pages to check. May nakita akong sketches doon ng rooms and

buildings.

“Thanks, pre! You’re the best!” Luna smiled and gave Sevi a thumbs up.

“May bayad ‘yan,” nakangising sagot ni Sevi.

“May bayad pa, delayed na nga! Dapat nga ikaw na ang magbayad. You’re now

liable for damages,” Luna laughed.

“Sige nga, kanino mo natutunan ‘yan?” Sevi raised a brow.

Sumeryoso bigla ang mukha ni Luna sinuntok ulit si Sevi sa braso.

“Oo na, break na nga, e, diba?!” Luna sarcastically said.

Napairap ako at tumalikod na sa kanilang dalawa para maglakad paalis. Mukhang

matagal pa sila mag-uusap, e. Kuya Roel was already waiting for me.

“Elyse!” I heard Sevi calling me.

I tried walking faster but he had longer legs than me kaya naabutan niya ‘ko

kaagad. Humarang siya sa dinadaanan ko kaya napahinto ako at tumingin sa

kanya.

“What?” I raised a brow.

“Bakit umaalis ka kaagad?”

“Kuya Roel’s waiting for me sa carpark,” I crossed my arms.

“Alam mo ba kung saan ang carpark?” Siya ngayon ang nagtaas ng kilay sa’kin.

Right! Hindi tuloy ako nakasagot doon dahil hindi ko nga alam ang daan

pabalik. He nodded and gestured me to follow him. Kahit ayoko, kailangan ko pa

rin sumunod sa kanya dahil siya ang nakakaalam ng daan! Nakakainis naman!

“Okay na ko rito. Go,” we stopped in front of the carpark’s entrance. “I don’t

want Kuya Roel to see you.”

“Sige,” tumango siya. “Ingat ka.”

Tinalikuran ko na siya at naglakad na paakyat. Kuya Roel was on his phone when

I arrived. Inabot ko sa kanya ang pagkain at sinabing kumain muna siya pero

sabi niya pag-uwi na lang daw.

“I’m home,” sabi ko pagkapasok ng bahay.

Isang sapatos pa lang ang natatanggal ko ay natigilan na ‘ko dahil nakita si

Kuya na nagmamadaling bumaba ng hagdan, galit at namumula ang kanang pisngi. I

heard my Dad calling him in a stern voice but he continued walking fast.

“Kuya-”

Nilagpasan niya ‘ko at tuloy-tuloy lang lumabas.

Nagmamadali akong umakyat sa study room ni Daddy at nakita siyang minamasahe

ang sentido niya. Nagkalat ang papeles sa sahig kaya lumuhod ako para ligpitin

‘yon. I was so confused.

“Just leave it there, Elyse,” my dad stopped me.

“Did you hurt him?” I asked, hoping he would say no.

“Don’t worry about it,” he dismissed my question immediately.

“Why would you do that?” Hindi makapaniwalang tanong ko.

“Just stay out of this mess, Eli. This is none of your concern,” his voice was

stern.

Hindi na ‘ko nagsalita at lumabas na lang ng study room para bumalik sa kwarto

ko. Nakita ko si Mommy sa hallway, may dalang tray ng kape. She gave me a

small smile to assure me that everything’s okay.

I sighed and went inside my room. Kinuha ko kaagad ang phone ko at sinubukang

tawagan si Kuya pero iniignore niya ang tawag ko. Napabuntong-hininga ako ulit

at binagsak ang sarili sa kama.

I checked my phone again when it beeped.

From: Kuya

I’m fine. Don’t worry about me.

I pouted and typed my reply.

To: Kuya

Put ice sa cheek mo hmp

From: Kuya

Hahaha okay. I’m driving. Wag ka na magreply.

Hindi na nga ako nag-reply. I really wished someone was taking care of him.

Mag-isa lang kasi siya sa condo at malayo na siya kila Ate Ericka dahil

lumipat siya. Wala rin ang bestfriend niyang si Hiro kaya wala na siyang

kasama. For sure, marami siyang friends but kaunti lang naman ang nakakaalam

ng problems niya. I think si Hiro lang.

I should message him!

Binuksan ko kaagad ang Instagram ko para mag-send ng message sa kanya.

Tinignan ko ang oras. Umaga na siguro roon. Hindi ko lang alam kung gising na

siya.

elydezma: Hello are u awake

He was online agad. Nagty-type na rin siya.

akihiro: Yes

akihiro: Why? :)

elydezma: Can you check on my brother I think his problems are piling up. He

would probably talk to you. I don’t want to make him feel na nangingialam ako

huhu

akihiro: Why? Did something happen?

elydezma: Wala I think he had a fight with my dad

akihiro: I’ll call him when he gets home.

elydezma: Thank you. Take care :)

I was smiling by myself. He was just so nice! Kaya ko siya naging crush, e!

Simula pa lang noong nagkakilala kami, gusto ko na siya, but he never saw me

as a woman. Ang tingin niya sa’kin ay kapatid lang ng bestfriend niya. How

sad.

I became so busy with my training dahil next month na ang cheerdance.

Nagsimula na rin ang second round ng UAAP Men’s basketball kaya palagi na

kaming nasa arena para suportahan ang athletes namin.

I was wearing our cheerdance costume, naka-braid ang buhok at nakatayo sa

steps ng Arena. I was nervous because UST ang kalaban ngayon. For the past few

weeks, hindi kami nag-usap or nagkita man lang ni Sevi. We were both busy and

wala namang reason para magkita or mag-usap so okay lang.

“Eli, ah. You know our cheer. Hindi Go USTe,” Ate Raya reminded me, laughing.

“I know!” I pouted. “Why would I cheer for UST?!”

“Bakit nga ba?” Ate Mae smirked. “Oh my gosh, andyan na sila Camero! Hoy, ang

gwapo, oh.”

Napatingin kaagad ako sa harapan. I saw Sevi walking with his teammates, and a

duffel bag was placed on his shoulder. Nakasuot na siya ng jersey nila at

naka-itim ulit na knee support. Pati sapatos ay itim.

Oh, he had a haircut. He looked more fresh. Mas malinis na lalo siyang tignan

ngayon. Mukhang ang bango niya.

He laughed when his teammate whispered something on him at hinampas pa niya ng

towel. May lumapit sa kanyang isa pang teammate habang may kinukuha siya sa

duffel bag niya. May binulong sa kanya ang lalaki at nagulat ako nang biglang

magtama ang tingin namin.

I looked away in an instant. Nakita ko pa rin sa peripheral vision ko na

nakatingin siya kaya inabala ko kunwari ang sarili sa pakikipag-usap kay Jon,

isa sa ka-squad ko.

When the game started, bumalik na ulit ako sa pwesto ko para mag-cheer. La

Salle started so great! Lamang kaagad ang points nila sa UST. Sevi looked a

little off, though, kaya hindi na ‘ko nagulat nang tinawag siya ng coach nila

after the first quarter.

Someone replaced him sa second quarter. Humahabol na ang UST pero lamang pa

rin ang La Salle. I was screaming my lungs out for the cheer. Mas malakas pa

kapag nakaka-shoot ang team namin. It was so fun, but I did not feel any

happiness.

“L-A-S-A-L-L-E!” We yelled.

Sevi came back for the third quarter. I was more focused on the game. He was

doing better now! Puro three points kaya nahabol kaagad. Nakalamang sila sa

amin! I pouted and became more competitive!

“Green, White, Figh- Oh my god!” I covered my mouth when Sevi fell on the

floor.

Nanlaki ang mata ko at bumaba nang isang palapag para makita nang maayos! I

did not see what happened! Next thing I knew, he was already on the floor,

holding his leg in pain! His teammates ran towards him to check his condition.

“Oh my god,” I whispered again.

He was pulled out from the game and went with the medics.

Hindi na ‘ko nakapag-focus nang maayos sa laro. Our team celebrated when we

won the game. I just smiled and went with Ate Raya, papunta sa players namin.

“Good job, guys!” They congratulated them.

“What happened with Camero?” I asked Kuya Terrence.

“He was running, but Sean blocked to get the ball from him. Lakas ng impact ng

pagkabunggo nila kaya bumagsak sa sahig. I think he twisted his ankle,”

pagpapaliwanag niya.

“Oh,” mahinang sabi ko. “Is he okay?”

“Aba malay ko, Eli!” He laughed.

Wala na si Sevi sa court kaya umalis na lang din kami. Pagkabalik sa La Salle,

walang training so maaga akong nakauwi. I just showered and changed my clothes

before laying down on my bed with my pajamas.

Kinuha ko ang phone ko at nag-chat sa kanya.

elydezma: U ok?

He replied immediately.

sevirous: hmm, ano sa tingin mo?

What the hell?! Nagawa pang magbiro!

elydezma: Just answer wtf are you in the hospital?

sevirous: kung oo, pupuntahan mo ba ‘ko?

elydezma: Why can’t you just answer properly? Hindi kaya brain mo ‘yung

natamaan?

sevirous: bawal na raw ako mag basketball kahit kailan. kakaopera ko lang.

elydezma: WHAT? ARE YOU SERIOUS WHAT HAPPENED ANG BILIS NAMAN

sevirous: oo nga e mamamatay na raw ako bukas

Napairap kaagad ako sa inis.

sevirous: dejk nakauwi na ‘ko. pinauwi na ‘ko ng doktor.

elydezma: Why? Bakit pinauwi ka kaagad?

sevirous: pagkapasok ko sa clinic niya tinanong niya ‘ko kung kumusta ako sabi

ko okay lang po ayun pinauwi na niya ‘ko

Can’t he just fucking answer properly?! Nakakainis! Mahal ang oras ko, ‘no!

Buti nga kinumusta ko pa siya, e. I made an effort to send a message!

elydezma: Ang pangit mong kausap

sevirous: laro tayo

Ano ba ‘yan? Maglalaro pa!

elydezma: What now?

sevirous: mind game ‘to. think of the last digit of your mobile number.

elydezma: Okay and then?

sevirous: add 4. tandaan mo ‘yung number na ‘yan, ah.

elydezma: Then

sevirous: then think of the second to the last digit. add 5. tandaan mo ulit.

elydezma: Then?

sevirous: eliminate mo ‘yung first two digits ng number mo, tapos palitan mo

‘yung last two digits nung sinabi ko kanina. tapos na?

elydezma: And then

sevirous: ‘yung mga natitirang number, times mo sa 2. ano nang nakuha mo

ngayon?

Tinype ko ang nakuha kong number.

elydezma: O nasaan ‘yung mind game

I almost jumped on my bed when my phone rang.

It was an unknown number. Matagal kong tinignan ‘yon at pinag-isipan kung

sasagutin ko ba o hindi. Baka scam, e! Or baka mag-offer ng wifi or something!

I often get calls like that.

Whatever. I’ll answer na nga.

“Hello?” Maingat na sagot ko.

[Hi.]

My lips parted when I heard Sevi’s voice! What the fuck! Did he just.. trick

me?! At nagpauto naman ako!

“You scam!” Tumayo ako at tumuro sa kawalan. “Inuto mo ‘ko!”

[Mind game nga, e. Dapat ginamitan mo ng utak para hindi ka nauto.] He

laughed.

I bit my lower lip and sat down on my bed. His voice sounded lower on the

phone. It was a bit husky, too.

“Bakit ka tumawag, huh?”

[Wala lang. Ayaw mo ba?] He asked carefully.

“How’s your leg?” I asked out of curiosity.

[Okay na. Ipapahinga ko lang kaya hindi ako makakapaglaro sa susunod na game.]

I can almost hear him smiling. [Pakisabi sa player niyo, sorry. Nagkabungguan

kami.]

“It was his fault, though. Why are you saying sorry?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

[Hindi ko rin naman siya napansin.] I heard him chuckle.

We talked about the game over the phone for a few more minutes until my mom

called me for dinner. Pinatay ko ang tawag at bumaba na para kumain. After

that, I did my skincare and went back to bed.

It was another busy week. I would attend classes in the morning and noon, and

then training after. I was strict on my diet now dahil flyer ako. Mahihirapan

ako kapag bumigat ako lalo.

Nasa klase ako, nagchecheck ng phone. I already followed Sevi yesterday kaya

lumalabas na ang story niya sa timeline ko. Samantha Vera was following him

kaya nagtaka ako but.. Oh well, Sam knows everyone.

I stopped swiping the stories of my friends when his story showed up.

Napakunot kaagad ang noo ko nang makita ang picture niya kasama ang tatlong

babaeng naka Archi uniform. May bandage siya sa ankle niya at nakaupo sa bench

habang ang tatlong babae ay nakapalibot sa kanya at nakaturo sa paa niya,

tuwang-tuwa. He looked bored.

Sa susunod na story niya ay selfie nila ni Luna. His brows were furrowed and

Luna was squeezing his cheeks with one hand, forcing him to look at the

camera.

Napairap ako at pinatay na ang phone para gumawa ng activity. I was with Ida

after school, kumakain ng fruits habang naghihintay ng training.

“How’s it going with Camero?” Siniko niya ‘ko, nakangisi.

“What do you mean? There’s nothing going on,” naguguluhang sabi ko.

“Really, huh? Palagi ka ngang naka-abang sa phone mo!”

“I am not!” I shook my head.

She was not convinced with my answer but she did not question me further.

Thank God! Kahit ano naman atang sabihin ko, hindi siya macoconvince. Natakot

na tuloy ako. Ganoon din ba tingin ng ibang tao?

My gosh, ang issue. Fine, iiwasan ko na nga siya. Baka makarating pa kay Kuya

or kay Daddy! Hindi ko na rin naman kayang magsinungaling kay Kuya Roel!

Kawawa naman siya.

And also, I think.. he still likes Luna.

The next day was a Sunday so like usual, I went to the gym. I wasn't expecting

Sevi to be there dahil sa ankle niya, so I was shocked when I saw him enter

while I was doing squats. He was with Arkin once again!

"Nagsalita ang friendzoned," rinig kong sabi ni Sevi kay Arkin pagkapasok,

tumatawa pa.

"Wow, don't act like it did not happen to you," Arkin fired back.

"Tapos na ko roon. Ikaw, tanga ka pa rin," pang-aasar lalo ni Sevi.

"Uy, Eli!" Arkin waved at me when he saw me.

I just gave him a smile and continued doing my exercise. Sevi looked at me for

a minute before placing his bag on the bench. He was wearing a black shirt

that hugged his body perfectly, and black athletic shorts. Hindi ko sila

pinansin at nag-suot na lang ng airpods para hindi sila marinig.

I did some burpees, push-ups, and russian twists. Paminsan-minsan, nagtatama

ang tingin namin ni Sevi. I would look away immediately, not wanting to converse with him. Kausap niya rin naman si Arkin, e.

After planking, nag cool down na ‘ko. Tinanggal ko ang airpods ko at binalik sa bag. Kinuha ko rin ang towel ko para magpunas ng pawis.

“The hell,” inis na sabi ko nang makitang ubos na ang tubig ko.

“Oh,” napalingon ako kay Sevi nang abutan niya ‘ko ng water bottle.

He was standing so close to me! Agad akong humakbang pagilid para makalayo nang kaunti. Napakunot ang noo niya sa inakto ko.

“No, thanks,” I ignored his offer na water bottle kahit uhaw na uhaw na ‘ko.

Bumuntong-hininga siya at binaba na ang kamay. Umiwas ako ng tingin at nag-kunwaring abala sa pagpupunas ng pawis.

“Galit ka ba sa’kin?” He asked softly.

Napalingon ako kaagad sa kanya, gulat. Why would he ask me that? Did I look mad? I was just avoiding him!

“No,” maikling sagot ko.

“Bakit mo ‘ko nilalayuan?” He looked confused.

“Hindi, ah,” I faked a laugh.

He stepped forward so I automatically stepped backwards. He stopped and pursed

his lips, looking serious now. His dark eyes stared at me for a moment, which

made me nervous.

“Okay,” he whispered before turning his back against me.

Binalik ko ang tingin ko sa bag ko at kinuha na lang ang towel para makapag-

shower na. I was still nervous inside the shower. Bakit ba? Like I did

something bad, right?! Bakit nga ba ako guilty ngayon?

Nagpalit na ‘ko ng black high-waisted shorts and red tank top. Pagkalabas ko,

nakaupo na si Sevi sa bench at nasa harapan niya si Arkin. They were talking

seriously about something. Napalingon si Arkin sa’kin nang makita ako at

nginitian lang ako.

I comtemplated about what to do next while fixing my things. I felt guilty for

suddenly.. avoiding him! I mean, we were kind of friends, right? Kahit hindi

naman namin napagkasunduan?

Fine, I’ll talk to him!

Tumalikod ako kaagad para maglakad papunta sa kanya pero napahinto rin nang

makita siya sa harapan ko. He was about to say something but stopped!

“H-hey,” I was out of breath.

“Ano?” Masungit na tanong niya.

“Anong ano? You.. went to me,” I pointed that out.

He sighed heavily. Arkin was just seated on the bench, looking at the other

direction so he could give us privacy, pero kitang-kita ko ang mapang-asar na

ngiti niya.

“Uhm,” I bit my lower lip.

He looked at me and raised a brow, waiting for me to talk. Huminga ako nang

malalim bago siya tiningala.

“Breakfast?” Aya ko.

:)

07

“Ayoko nga.”

My jaw dropped when he refused my offer! The side of his lip rose up before

getting his towel and leaving me here! Pinanood ko siyang pumasok sa shower

room, iniwan akong nakatanga.

Hindi ako makapaniwala! Did he just reject me?! It was my first time asking a

man to eat with me tapos ire-reject niya lang ‘yon? My god, hindi niya alam

kung gaano kalaki ang nawala sa kanya. Hmp. It’s his loss, not mine! I mean, I

swallowed my pride for us to be okay and to lessen my guilt, tapos ganoon?

Inis akong umupo sa monoblock at napagpasyahang hintayin pa rin siya. I was

sure he was playing hard to get! I’ll try for the second time and kapag ayaw

niya pa rin, e’di huwag! I’ll go na and eat my salad alone!

“Arkin,” I called him.

Hindi niya kaagad natugunan ang tawag ko because he was busy taking a picture

with his fans. Nang matapos, lumapit siya sa’kin, nagpupunas pa ng pawis.

“Bakit ang annoying ng bestfriend mo?” Iritang tanong ko.

“Huh?” He laughed. “Bakit? Ano bang sabi niya?”

“He rejected my offer to get breakfast!” Sumimangot ako.

“Gusto mong mapapayag?” He smirked.

“Paano?”

He gave me a ‘wait’ sign to get his towel. Dahil sabi niya, naghintay nga ‘ko

mula sa pagkapasok niya sa shower room, hanggang sa paglabas niya. He was now

wearing a white polo and jeans. Halatang nagmadali siyang maligo para maunahan

si Sevi.

“O, what’s your plan?” I asked him.

Magsasalita na sana siya pero natigilan nang makitang lumabas na rin si Sevi

galing sa shower. He was now wearing a plain white v-neck shirt and black

shorts. Pinupunasan niya ang buhok gamit ang towel habang naglalakad palapit

sa may bench.

“Saan ka na? May schedule ka?” Tanong niya kay Arkin, purposely ignoring me.

“Ah, magbe-breakfast pa kami ni Elyse,” umakbay sa’kin si Arkin.

Sevi’s lips parted a little as he stared at Arkin’s hand on my shoulder.

Pagkatapos, binalik niya ang tingin sa’kin, sunod kay Arkin. He pursed his

lips and shook his head a little, hindi na kami pinansin.

“What the hell, ayaw niya na lalo,” inis kong bulong kay Arkin.

“Just wait for it,” Arkin smirked.

Inalis ko ang akbay niya sa’kin at tinalikuran na siya para ayusin ang bag ko.

Nilagay ko na ang mga gamit ko roon, handa nang umalis. Kung ayaw niya, e’di

huwag!

Pagkatalikod ko, muntik na ulit akong mabunggo sa dibdib ni Sevi. He was already standing in front of me with his bag on his shoulder. Arkin was laughing while fixing his things.

“Ako ‘yung inaya mo, diba?” Sevi raised a brow.

“E, ayaw mo, e,” I shrugged casually.

“Kaya mag-aaya ka ng iba?” Seryosong tanong niya.

Phew, why was he so serious ba? Para namang napakalaki ng kasalanan ko sa itsura niyang ‘yan! My gosh.

“Tara na, Eli!” Malokong lumapit si Arkin, dala-dala na ang bag niya.

“Sama ako,” singit ni Sevi.

“Ha?” Arkin scratched his ear a little, acting like he did not hear him.

“Sasama ako,” Sevi repeated, more serious now.

“Akala ko ba ayaw mo?” Naguguluhang sabi ni Arkin. “Huwag ka na sumama, pre. Mukhang busy ka!”

“Bakit ayaw mo?” Sevi raised a brow.

Arkin stepped backwards and raised both of his arms, giving up now. He laughed so hard and shook his head.

“Chill, joke lang! Tangina, bubugbugin mo na ata ako, e!” Tumawa siya at

tinapik ang balikat ni Sevi.

“Saan ka pupunta?” Sevi’s brows furrowed.

“May taping ako, gago! Hahaha, enjoy your breakfast!” Kumaway si Arkin at

nagmamadali nang lumabas ng gym.

Naiwan tuloy kaming dalawa ni Sevi. It was so awkward! Nilagay ko na lang ang

duffel bag sa balikat at sinenyasan siyang sumunod sa’kin palabas. He really

did. Pagkalabas ko, naroon na si Kuya Roel, naghihintay.

“Can you drive us to the mall first? I’ll eat breakfast lang with my friend to

discuss our.. group project, Kuya,” I lied again.

“Okay, Ma’am,” tumango siya at sumakay na sa kotse.

Hindi nagsasalita si Sevi hanggang sa makasakay. He was sitting at the very

edge of the backseat. Mukhang sinisiksik niya ang sarili niya roon kahit

tumatama na ang tuhod sa likod ng shotgun seat. He was too tall.

“Hey, why are you so grumpy?” I whispered.

Nakatingin lang siya sa bintana, pinapanood ang ibang sasakyan. Sumimangot ako

at umusog nang kaunti para makalabit ko siya. I reached for the sleeve of his

shirt and tugged on it a little. Napatingin tuloy siya sa’kin, nakasandal ang

siko sa bintana at pinaglalaruan ang labi.

“What the hell is your problem?” I whispered.

“Ikaw ata ang may problema, e,” he whispered back.

“This is exactly the reason why people are making an issue about us,” inis na

sabi ko pero pabulong pa rin dahil baka marinig ni Kuya Roel.

“Anong issue?” Tumaas ang kilay niya.

“Na we have a ‘thing’. Inaasar ako ng friends ko and pati ikaw, right?” I

toned down my voice again.

“Oh?” Kumunot ang noo niya. “Ano naman?”

My lips parted a little and realized what he just said. Ano naman, huh? So

wala siyang pakialam kahit isipin ng mga tao na nagfi-flirt kami? Well, I

usually don’t care din naman about sa opinions ng ibang tao about me. Marami

akong naririnig na maldita ako, attitude, bitch, maarte, childish, pero hindi

ako naapektuhan.

Because they were right. Duh!

“You’re not bothered by it?” I asked.

He scoffed sarcastically and rolled his eyes a little like I said something

funny. Binalik na niya ang tingin sa bintana at hindi na sinagot ang tanong

ko.

Hinatid na kami ni Kuya Roel sa tapat ng pancake restaurant na gusto ko.

Naunang bumaba si Sevi pagkatapos magpasalamat kay Kuya Roel. I was about to

open the door on my side when Kuya Roel talked.

“Sana magkabati na kayo, Ma’am,” he chuckled.

“Huh?!”

I looked away when I realized that he probably heard the whole conversation! I

mean, the car was small enough for him to hear our whispers. Nagmamadali na

tuloy akong bumaba at sinara ulit ang pinto para maglakad na papasok ng

restaurant.

Pagkaupo namin, may lumapit na kaagad na waitress para ibigay ang menu. Nasa

harapan ko si Sevi, hindi na nag-abalang tignan ang menu. Katabi namin ang

glass wall kaya roon siya nakatingin, pinapanood ang mga taong dumadaan.

“What’s your order?” I asked. “My treat.”

“Kung ano sa’yo,” maikling sagot niya.

I was planning to eat salad lang pero napa-pancake ako para iyon din ang

kainin niya. I called the waitress again. Pagkalapit niya, nakita ko kaagad

ang kakaibang tingin niya kay Sevi na nakapahalumbaba at nakatingin sa labas.

“I’m the one who’s gonna order,” I tried to get her attention.

“What’s your order, M-Ma’am?” Nilabas niya ang maliit niyang note pad para

magsulat doon.

I ordered two sets of pancakes, and then dalawang fruit shake. I guess I won’t

eat lunch today. Pakiramdam ko mabubusog na ‘ko sa ganito lang.

“Are you still mad?” I asked when the waitress left. “Why are you so mad at

me? I could have done worse but I did not!”

“Ah, salamat naman pala,” sarkastikong sagot niya.

I bit my lower lip to stop myself from letting out a laugh. I don’t know! He

just sounded funny when he used sarcasm. Hindi ko alam bakit pikon na pikon

siya. Masama ba ang gising niya today?

“How’s your leg? You can walk properly now,” pansin ko.

“Huwag mong tanungin,” he said while pouring water on his glass.

“Why not?”

“Baka magka-issue,” he mocked me.

I couldn’t contain my laugh anymore. Mas lalo pang nagkasalubong ang kilay

niya dahil tinawanan ko ang sinabi niya.

“Why are you being such a kid?!” Reklamo ko, natatawa.

“Wow!” Hindi makapaniwalang sambit niya.

Napanguso ako saglit para pigilan ang ngiti ko dahil mas naaasar siya. I exhaled a large amount of air and inhaled slowly, calming myself before talking.

“Listen,” I slightly leaned over the table so he could hear me properly.

“Hindi ka ba nabobother? People are thinking that we are.. together.”

“Anong pakialam ko?” He arched a brow.

“Okay, then! Kung wala kang pakialam, ako mayroon,” I crossed my arms.

“Bakit? Nakakahiya ba ‘ko kasama?” Diretsong tanong niya.

Nagulat ako bigla sa tanong niya at hindi nakapagsalita. Of course, walang nakakahiya, what the hell! I was just scared na baka malaman ni Daddy or ni Kuya na sumasama ako sa kanya. My dad was strict, specially when it comes to boys. ‘Yung age pa niya at age ko, baka isipin niyang tinetake advantage ako ni Sevi! My god, iniisip ko pa lang reaction niya, naririndi na ‘ko sa sermon.

And Sevi’s mom works for him. Ano na lang ang mangyayari, right? Baka mawalan pa ng trabaho! I was really overthinking the consequences. It was better to be

safe than sorry.

“Okay,” Sevi licked his lower lip and slowly nodded. “Cancel mo ‘yung order.

Aalis na ‘ko.”

“What?”

Bago pa ‘ko makapagsalita ulit ay tumayo na siya at tuloy-tuloy na naglakad

paalis, iniwan ako mag-isa rito!

Matagal akong nakatulala, iniisip kung bakit ganoon. Nakabalik lang ako sa

katotohanan nang dumating ang waitress para i-hain ang pagkain. I stopped her

immediately.

“Take out na lang. Thank you,” sambit ko.

Tumango siya at hindi na nagtanong. Napaisip siguro siya kung saan nagpunta

ang kasama ko. Nang bumalik siya, dala ang paper bag, tumayo na ‘ko at bumalik

sa kotse. Inis na inis ako nang makasakay kaya hindi na nagtanong si Kuya

Roel.

Nang makarating sa bahay, binigay ko ang paper bag kay Kuya Roel, pati ang

fruit shake. Sa kanya na lang ‘yon dahil nawalan na ‘ko ng gana!

Siguro mas mabuti na nga ‘yon, ‘yung hindi na kami mag-uusap.

“Eli, pick a gown!” Sabi ni Mommy pagkapasok ko.

Nagtataka akong tumingin sa paligid. They were designers and stylists in the

couch at may mga mannequin na nakahilera roon, suot ang iba’t-ibang design ng

gown. My brows furrowed, trying to think if I missed an event.

“Birthday party ng Dad mo next Saturday, right? You need to pick a gown.

Everyone will be there, including his business partners so you need to present

yourself nicely,” my mom informed me.

Right! Birthday ni Daddy!

Tinignan ko ang mga gown at nakuha kaagad ng atensyon ko ang dark blue off

shoulder evening gown na gradient. Nagfe-fade ang color hanggang sa dulo ng

gown kaya white na lang. It has crystals all over it and it was fitted.

Hanggang taas lang ng ankle ang harapan at ang likod ng gown ay abot hanggang

sahig. I think it was perfect.

“This one,” I pointed at it.

“Perfect!” Sabi ng stylist.

Mom asked me to put it on to check if it would fit me. It hugged my body

perfectly kaya nakaakyat na ‘ko kaagad. Nag-gym lang naman ako pero feeling ko

napagod ako sa araw ko. I decided to just read books the whole day just to

distract myself from the guilt I was feeling.

For the whole week, wala akong ginawa kung hindi um-attend ng classes at mag-

training pagkatapos.

From: Kuya

Anong oras matatapos training mo?

It was Friday, 8 PM nang mareceive ko ang text ni Kuya. I kind of replied late

because I was in the middle of our training.

To: Kuya

Around 9 sabi ni coach so we can rest. Why?

From: Kuya

We’ll pick you up. I’m with Helen, Ericka, and Neil.

I was excited! Matagal ko nang hindi nakikita friends ni Kuya. Palagi akong

sumasama sa kanila noon. Hindi sila complete ngayon, though. Busy siguro ang

iba. Hindi ko alam kung bakit sila magkakasama ngayon at kung saan kami

pupunta but the thrill just made me more excited.

“Bye guys!” Nagmamadaling sabi ko pagkapalit ko ng damit.

“Saan punta? May date kay Captain?” Panloloko ni Ate Raya.

“No! We don’t talk anymore!” Tanggi ko kaagad.

“Ay, ghosted agad?!” Tumawa si Ate Mae. “Ghouste!”

Hindi ko na sila nilingon at nagmamadali nang umalis para puntahan ‘yung place

kung saan naka-park si Kuya. Van ang dala nila ngayon kaya mas lalo akong

nagtaka. It was probably Neil’s black van. Parang artista van nga, e.

Customized ang loob.

“Hi!” I squealed when Ate Helen opened the door.

I hugged the three of them. Si Kuya ang nagdadrive at lahat sila nasa likod

na. He looked like a driver.

“Where are we going?” I asked Ate Ericka.

“Airport, Eli!” Excited na sagot niya. “Aren’t you excited?”

“Huh?” Kumunot ang noo ko. “Why? Are we going out of the country? I did not

bring my passport!”

Kinabahan kaagad ako! Minsan pa naman sobrang spontaneous nila! Mamaya, bumili

pala sila ng airplane ticket. Wala nga akong damit at wala rin akong dalang

passport! Pati charger, wala. I would die!

“You’ll see,” Ate Helen winked at me.

I anticipated it more! Kinakabahan nga lang dahil baka nga umalis kami ng

bansa. Hindi pa naman nila nagagawa ‘yon pero malay mo lang naisipan nila

bigla!

Nang makarating sa airport, may kausap na si Kuya sa phone. My brother stopped

the car in front of the arrivals. Napakunot ang noo ko nang may matanaw na

pamilyar na lalaki.

“Oh my god!” I screamed, napahawak pa sa braso ni Ate Ericka.

Pagkababa ni Kuya, dali-dali ring binuksan ni Neil ang pinto ng van kaya

bumaba na rin kami.

“Hiro!” I waved while running like an excited kid.

Hiro smiled at us, may suot na itim na backpack at sa tabi niya, naroon ang

dalang malaking maleta. Niyakap siya ni Kuya Shan at tinapik sa balikat at

ganoon din si Kuya Neil. They were whispering something to him that I did not

understand.

“Ilang buwan ka pa lang nakakaalis, nandito ka nanaman? Sayang despedida

party,” Ate Helen hugged him.

“Babalik din ako,” Hiro smiled.

“Sino nga bang binalikan dito?” Ngumisi si Ate Ericka bago siya niyakap.

“Shut up,” Hiro smiled and looked at me. “Elyse,” he greeted.

I pouted and gave him a tight hug. I missed him! All of us missed him! Grabe

rin ang iniyak ko sa despedida party niya, ah! I really thought I would never

see him again. Wala naman na siyang plano talaga umuwi. Hindi ko alam kung

bakit nandito nanaman siya.

Tinulungan siya nila Kuya sa gamit niya at nilagay sa likod. Pagkasakay sa

van, ang dami na kaagad nilang pinag-uusapan. ‘Yung iba, hindi ko na

maintindihan!

“Still can’t find her, bro. I’m sorry,” Kuya Shan said while driving.

“It’s fine,” Hiro sighed.

Hndi ko maintindihan pero masaya pa rin ako dahil umuwi siya. Well, at least

may kasama na ulit si Kuya, right? Kahit temporary lang. Feeling ko babalik

din naman ulit si Hiro sa Florida. It was just that.. maybe may gagawin siyang

importante rito kaya siya umuwi.

We ate in a 24/7 fastfood. I posted a selfie of us in my Instagram story with

the caption ‘I’m so glad you’re back! Missed you :(‘ and a cute filter. He was

smiling and effortlessly looking good. He still looked a little tired from the

flight though.

“Birthday ni Daddy tomorrow. You should go!” Aya ko kay Hiro.

Napatingin siya bigla kay Kuya Shan and they whispered about something.

Tumango si Kuya at bumuntong-hininga.

“Yeah, I’ll go,” Hiro gave me a small smile.

Good. Kapag pupunta siya, pupunta si Kuya for sure! Buti naman. Akala ko kasi

hindi aattend si Kuya, e. Last year, he did not attend.

After eating, hinatid na kaagad namin si Hiro sa bahay nila para

makapagpahinga siya. It must be tiring to sit on the plane for so many hours.

Ah, wait, magpipiloto nga pala siya. Kaya niya ‘yon.

The next day, maaga akong gumising para kumain at maligo. Dumating na rin ang

stylist ni Mommy para ayusan kaming dalawa. Fraida was inside my room again,

waiting for her turn. Nakalibre pa siya ng make-up.

“Kuya Hiro’s home? I saw sa IG story mo,” chika niya kaagad at humiga sa kama

ko.

“Yes. It was unexpected. Hindi ko nga alam! Kahapon lang noong sinundo siya sa

airport!” I was so excited but I couldn’t move dahil nilalagyan ako ng

eyeshadow.

We finished around 5 PM. My soft-curled hair was in a wavy ponytail, leaving

some bangs and a small strands of hair at the side of my face. Nagsuot ako ng

diamond necklace at diamond earrings. It was perfect for my evening gown.

Naka-contact lens din ako na grey.

“This would be fun!” Fraida, on the other hand, was wearing a wine-colored

evening gown. She had her hair in a messy bun.

Nang matapos, hinatid na kami ni Kuya Roel sa venue. Nauna na kasi sila Mommy

doon para mag-greet ng guests. When we arrived at the luxurious hotel, natanaw

ko na kaagad sila Kuya na nakatayo sa entrance, nag-uusap sila ni Hiro.

“Hey,” Kuya greeted. “Pasok na kayo sa loob.”

“I’ll see you later!” Sabi ko sa kanila bago pumasok sa double doors, kasama

si Ida.

Marami nang tao pagkapasok ko. Marami na rin ang naguusap-usap sa cocktail

tables, holding their wine glasses and champagne glasses. It was just a formal

party at walang program or anything. Para lang siyang gathering ng business

partners and employees ng company.

Employees!

Mommy ni Sevi!

Napalingon kaagad ako sa paligid, kinakabahan na baka nandito siya. I couldn’t

see everyone kaya nagpalagay na lang ako na wala siya rito. I should not even

be bothered by it. Kinalimutan ko na nga ‘yon buong week!

“Let’s get food,” aya ko kay Ida.

Lumapit kami sa long table para kumuha ng plato at pagkain. Kaunti lang ang

kinuha ko dahil sa diet kaya nauna na ‘ko kay Ida magpunta sa table.

“Oh my!” I suddenly stopped walking when a little girl fell on the floor while

she was playing with the other kids.

Dahil hawak ko ang plato ko at baso, wala akong available hand para tumulong.

I looked around, waiting for someone to help the kid who was about to cry.

Napaatras ako bigla nang makita si Sevi na naglalakad palapit in his black

suit. Wala siyang suot na necktie at nakabukas ang tatlong butones ng charcoal

grey dress shirt. He helped the kid up, pinagpagan pa ang suot nitong dress

habang pinapagalitan.

“Sabi ko sa’yo, huwag kang tumakbo,” he whispered on the kid.

Pagkatapos, binuhat niya na ‘yung bata at napatingin sa’kin.

“Uhm-” Hindi ko na natuloy ang sasabihin ko dahil naglakad na siya paalis.

I felt embarrassed kaya umalis na ‘ko kaagad para pumunta sa table namin nila

Kuya. Nilagay ko ang pagkain ko roon at tahimik na kumain. Ida sat beside me

and later on, dumating na rin sila Hiro at sila Ate Helen.

“What’s up?” Hiro sat beside me, holding a plate.

“I’m fine! How are you?” Gumanda kaagad ang mood ko!

“I hope I am fine,” he laughed. “I’m getting there.”

What the hell, bakit ang lonely naman ng sagot niya?

“I’m bored. Let’s play XOXO,” kinuha ko ang tissue at nilapag sa gitna naming

dalawa. I knew he had a ballpen with him. Palagi naman siyang may ballpen.

I was laughing the whole time we were playing dahil hindi pa ‘ko nananalo sa

kanya. Mas marami ang tie dahil hindi naman siya ganoon kahirap, pero minsan

naiisahan niya ‘ko, e. I laughed when I won the last round.

“Loser!” I pointed at him while laughing.

“You won once and lost 5 times. I don’t know who’s the loser,” he shrugged,

boasting.

We stopped playing when the photographer called the family members for a

picture. I looked at Kuya who was pretending not to hear anything. Sumimangot

ako at hinatak siya sa braso para papuntahin sa harapan.

“Elyse, I don’t want to take a picture-”

“For me, please?” I pouted.

He sighed heavily and nodded.

We took a picture as a family. It probably looked awkward dahil nang sinabi ng

photographer na wacky, walang nag-iba ng pose. We stayed formal, lalo na si

Kuya at Daddy. I, at least, made a peace sign just to lighten up the mood.

“You haven’t greeted me yet,” sabi ni Daddy kay Kuya.

Lumingon si Kuya sa kanya saglit, walang emosyon sa mukha.

“Happy birthday. I hope it’s not your last,” then he walked away.

“You son of a-”

“Daddy,” I stopped him.

“This is the reason why you’re getting all my fucking shares,” he said with so

much anger.

“Calm down. This is your party, okay?” My mom held his shoulders.

Hindi na ata sila mapagsasama sa iisang lugar nang hindi nag-aaway. My mom

tried her best to calm him down. Ako naman, sinubukan kong sumunod kay Kuya

pero nawala na siya sa paningin ko. Hiro disappeared, too. He was probably

with my brother.

I sighed and went out to the garden for a minute just to get fresh air. May

little playground sila roon kaya umupo ako sa swing at yumuko, pinaglalaruan

ang kamay ko.

“Shares,” I sarcastically said. “Who cares about those shares anyway..”

“Hi!”

Nagulat ako nang may batang lumapit sa’kin. It was the little girl who fell on

the floor. I stared at her for a minute, analyzing her resemblance to Sevi.

“Sofia,” napatingin ako kay Sevi na naglalakad na palapit. “Tinatawag ka na ni

Mama. Let’s go.”

“Kuya,” the kid pouted. She was probably around 3 to 4 years old. “Play?”

Sumulyap ulit sa’kin si Sevi, mukhang nacoconscious sa presensya ko. I did not

leave, though. Nauna ako rito, e! Bakit ako aalis?! I was thinking about those

freaking shares.

“Sige na, sige na,” Sevi sighed.

The little girl jumped out of joy and ran towards the slide. Sevi walked

towards me and sat on the other swing to watch his.. little sister play.

Tahimik lang kaming dalawa.

“You have a sister,” maikling sabi ko.

“Oo,” maikling sagot niya rin. “Tsaka brother.”

“Panganay ka?” I asked again.

“Oo.”

And we were silent again. I blowed on my cheek, hating the awkward atmosphere

surrounding us. I would prefer him being annoying than being this quiet.

“Congrats. Final four,” I remembered.

“Salamat,” he nodded. “Bagay sa’yo ‘yung suot mo.”

“Uhm, thanks, I guess.”

Napatingin kami sa kapatid niyang nagsa-slide doon. Mukha namang masaya siya

kaya hindi na namin siya pinakialaman. I looked up, trying to think of what we

should talk about next. The silence was so loud.

“Ano ba ‘yan, hindi ako sanay nang ganito,” he chuckled.

Napatingin ako sa kanya pero hindi siya nakatingin sa’kin.

“Magbati na lang tayo, please,” he sighed.

“U-uhm,” hindi ko alam ang sasabihin ko. “Okay. Uhm.. I’m sorry about what

happened last time. I was just thinking about.. a lot of things kaya.. Uhm..

Hindi ako nakasagot-”

“Okay lang,” he cut me off.

“Okay, then,” I pursed my lips and nodded. “May tanong ka pa ba? Let’s clear

this out.”

“Sino ‘yung kasama mo kanina? Boyfriend mo?” He did not even hesitate to ask.

My brows furrowed, trying to remember who I was with earlier. Kuya ko? Wait,

parang hindi naman. Omg, si Hiro?!

“No!” I denied so fast. “I mean, no..” I fake coughed.

“‘Yun ‘yung tinutukoy mo dati na gusto mo, diba?” He concluded.

“Well, yeah, but..” Hindi ko alam ang sasabihin ko. “Whatever. Why am I even

explaining?!”

Tumawa siya sa sinabi ko.

“Hindi kayo bagay,” he insulted.

Napaawang ang labi ko at agad napalingon sa kanya. He seemed unapologetic by

his rude comment! Parang gustong-gusto niya talagang sabihin ‘yon. Parang

naghintay pa talaga siya ng timing para masabi!

“Okay. I don’t remember asking,” I rolled my eyes.

“Totoo naman,” he scoffed. “Hindi ka para sa kanya.”

“Wow,” I sighed in disbelief. “I didn’t know you were THIS rude, huh?”

“Feeling ko..” He stopped midway.

“Feeling mo what?”

Feelingero talaga siya.

“Feeling ko mas bagay tayo. Feeling ko lang, ah. Hindi ko sure,” he shrugged,

nagyayabang.

I stared at him for a moment before biting the insides of my cheek to stop

myself from smiling. He was laughing now.

“You’re not feeling well,” I tried my best to sound serious.

“Gusto mo maging friends?” He asked me now.

Friends, huh.

“It’s fine,” I shrugged.

“Ako, ayoko.”

Nagulat ako at napalingon ulit sa kanya, hindi nagegets kung anong gusto

niyang iparating. He doesn’t want to be friends with me? Gosh! Being friends

with me is already a privilege! Kawawa naman siya kung hindi ko siya kaibigan.

“Kawawa ka naman if you don’t want to be my friend,” I made a sad face.

“Mas kawawa ka kapag naging friends tayo,” he countered.

“And why is that?”

“Kasi ibig sabihin noon, hanggang doon na lang tayo.”

I arched a brow and shifted on my seat. I was about to talk when his sister

ran towards him, pawis na pawis. Kinuha niya ang towel mula sa likod nito at

tinupi bago pinunasan ang pawis sa noo ng kapatid.

I never wanted a younger sibling, dahil baka magselos lang ako. Gusto ko ako

‘yung iniispoil, but seeing him with his sister made my heart soft.

“Crush?” She suddenly asked his brother and pointed at me.

Binaba ni Sevi ang kamay ng kapatid niya at tumawa.

“Oo,” Sevi smiled and nodded. “Crush ko ‘yan. Ganda ‘no?”

I smiled awkwardly at the kid. Tumango ang bata sa Kuya niya at ngumiti rin

sa’kin pabalik. Sinundan ng mga mata ko ang pagtayo ni Sevi, hawak hawak na

niya ang kamay ng kapatid niya.

He walked towards me and handed me his grey handkerchief. Nagtataka kong

tinignan ‘yon.

“What am I going to do with this?” I raised my brow.

“May rason na tayo para magkita ulit,” he smiled at me before walking away.

:)

08

“Si Kuya, nasaan na?”

Nanatili pa ‘ko sa labas saglit bago ako pumasok ulit sa loob. Dad was already

cutting the cake and sineserve na ng waiters sa bawat table. I looked around

to find my brother but I was mortified when I saw Sevi talking to my dad!

“Wala, I think they already left-”

Umalis kaagad ako, dala-dala si Fraida para pasimpleng lumapit so I could hear

their conversation. Sevi was holding a wine glass while his other hand was

placed inside his pocket. He was nodding to my dad! Hindi ko alam ano ang pinag-uusapan.

“Shh,” sabi ko kay Ida nang makalapit kami. “Pretend that we’re talking.”

“We are talking!” She was so confused.

I faked my laughed and hit her lightly with my hand just to pretend that we were talking about something else. Her brows furrowed and suddenly put the back of her hand on my forehead.

“Okay ka lang ba?” Nagtatakang tanong niya. “Wala ka namang sakit.”

“Jesus! Just pretend!” I whispered.

Lumapit pa ‘ko sa dalawa at tumalikod para hindi mahalatang nakikinig ako.

Marami namang nag-uusap na businessmen sa paligid kaya hindi nila ‘ko mapapansin.

“Sayang ang basketball career mo,” my dad said.

“Okay lang ‘yun, Sir. Engineering talaga ang gusto ko,” Sevi chuckled.

“That’s nice. Maybe in the future, I can hire you to build one of our resorts? I see a bright future ahead of you, kid.”

Umatras pa ‘ko para mas marinig ko.

“Salamat po, Si-”

Naramdaman kong may nabunggo ako sa pag-atras ko. Dali-dali kong inayos ang

sarili ko at humarap sa kanilang dalawa. They were already staring at me,

nagtataka kung bakit bigla na lang akong umaatras sa gitna nila!

“Oh, sorry, I was..” I tried to think of an excuse. “Ida pushed me!”

“Huh?!” Reklamo ni Ida.

“Sevi, this is Elyse,” my dad looked embarrassed dahil sa ginawa ko. “My

daughter. The youngest in the family.”

Sevi’s lips slowly formed a smile. Inalok niya ang kamay niya sa’kin at

umaktong hindi kami magkakilala.

“Sebastian Vincent Camero,” he introduced himself.

“Amora Elyse Ledezma,” I faked a smile and held his hand.

Sevi’s mouth formed a small ‘o’, shocked with the mention of my full name.

“I already met him sa debut ko, Dad, remember?” I faced my dad after the

little handshake.

“Right!” He laughed.

“Yeah, I did not invite him. You invited him,” I glared at Sevi who was still

smiling, probably enjoying the conversation.

“He’s the son of my secretary. Graduating na sa UST. Engineering, right? And

he’s doing well. You should be inspired by him,” umakbay pa siya kay Sevi.

Sevi smirked at me. What the hell! This.. mayabang man!

“I actually offered him a scholarship pero full scholar na pala siya ng UST,”

tinapik ni Daddy ang balikat ni Sevi.

“Wow,” I sarcastically said.

Sevi smirked more. “Ako lang ‘to, Elyse.”

“Kung wala pang kukuha sa’yo after ng boards, pwede kang mag-apply sa kumpanya

namin. We need engineers,” offer ni Daddy.

“Ah, kinukuha na po ako ng Valeria company,” Sevi gave a humble smile. “But

thank you for that offer, Sir. I’ll keep that in mind.”

What? Hindi pa nga siya graduate at hindi pa nagte-take ng boards, may

kumpanya na siyang pagtatrabahuhan? Valeria? The surname was familiar.

“Sevi’s graduating without a girlfriend. Be like him, Elyse. Hindi ka pa

pwedeng magka-boyfriend. That’s just a distraction,” dad reminded me.

Nasamid bigla si Sevi sa iniinom niyang wine.

“U-uh,” I smiled awkwardly. “Of course, Dad.”

“The future of our company is in your hands. Remember that. Wala akong aasahan

sa kuya mo. Ikaw na lang ang natitira,” he said in a stern voice. “Hindi ba,

Sev?”

“Opo,” Sevi nodded. “Tama po ‘yon. Distraction lang.”

Sevi excused himself to go to the restroom. Tinalikuran ko na rin si Daddy

dahil may kausap na siyang iba, pero hinatak niya ‘ko sa braso para

maipakilala. Sumimangot ako at hinarap ang dalawang kausap niya.

“Elyse, this is Mr. Ramirez,” he introduced. “He owns Ramirez Medical.”

“Hello, Sir,” I faked a smile and offered my hand.

Ngumiti siya sa’kin at tinanggap ‘yon.

“I heard about your son’s engagement. Congratulations,” my dad smiled.

“Would you excuse me,” I excused myself to exit the conversation. Wala naman

na ‘kong pakialam doon, e! I don’t even know him!

Hinatak ko na si Fraida sa braso para makalabas na ng venue. Wala na ang mga

kaibigan ko kaya gusto ko na lang din umuwi. Pagkalabas namin sa tapat ng

hotel, I already texted Kuya Roel to pick me up. Si Ida, susunduin ng sariling

driver.

“Wala bang tricycle dito, anak? Masyado namang mahal ang grab,” napalingon ako

sa babaeng nagsalita.

I saw Sevi’s mom holding Sofia with her other hand. Si Sevi, nakatayo sa tabi

niya at nagiiscroll sa phone.

“Okay na ‘yun, Ma. Walang dadaan na tricyle dito,” Sevi scratched his head a

little, getting frustrated.

Dahil nakatingin ako, napalingon din sa’kin ang Mama ni Sevi at ngumiti nang

mapagtanto kung sino ako. Naglakad ako palapit sa kanila to greet her. I

didn’t want to be rude.

“Saan po kayo?” I asked.

“Huwag na,” Sevi rejected immediately.

“No, I can ask my driver to drop you off,” I insisted.

“Huwag na nga-”

“Anak naman! Hayaan mo na! Makakatipid din tayo, oh. Nagmamagandang-loob na

nga ang anak ni Sir Ledezma,” siniko siya ng Mama niya. “Maraming salamat,

Elyse, ha.”

She smiled at me. Napailing si Sevi at bumuntong-hininga, halatang ayaw

magpahatid. Pumayag ‘yung Mama niya kaya wala rin siyang magagawa.

Nang huminto sa tapat ng stairs ang kotse, bumaba ako agad at kinausap si Kuya

Roel na ihatid sila Sevi sa bahay nila. Nanguna nang sumakay ang Mama niya sa

shotgun seat at pinabantayan si Sofia kay Sevi.

So sa backseat, nasa gitna namin ni Sevi si Sofia. Sevi was quiet. Nakatingin

lang siya sa labas habang ang Mama niya, tinatype ang address nila sa Waze.

“Kuya,” Sofia tugged on his sleeves. “Games.”

Nilabas ni Sevi ang phone niya at umiling. “Lowbat na ‘ko, Sof.”

Nilabas ko ang phone ko at inabot sa bata. Sevi looked at me again with

apologetic eyes, probably thinking that the kid was a bother for me, pati na

rin ang paghatid sa kanila.

“What do you want to play?” I made her look for games sa App store dahil wala

naman akong dinodownload na games sa phone ko.

“Mobile Legends,” Sevi laughed.

I glared at him. Napabalik lang ang tingin ko sa phone nang ituro ni Sofia

‘yung dress up game. Dinownload ko kaagad ‘yon and opened it for her. She

immediately figured it out herself.

“Where’s your brother?” I curiously asked.

“May camping sila sa school,” maikling sagot niya.

Hindi na ‘ko nagtanong pagkatapos noon hanggang sa makarating kami sa isang

street sa Manila. Sevi’s mom insisted na roon na lang sila i-drop off at

maglalakad na lang papunta sa bahay nila since maraming nakaharang na tricyle

at kotse sa gilid ng daan. Mahihirapan daw ang sasakyang umalis.

“Sofia, ibalik mo na ‘yung phone. Nandito na tayo,” sabi ni Sevi sa kapatid.

The kid pouted and gave me back my phone. Ngumiti ako sa kanya at kinuha ‘yon

mula sa kamay niya kahit halatang ayaw niyang ibigay. Kung hindi ko lang

kailangan ‘yon, e’di sana binigay ko na, hindi ba?

Binuksan na ni Sevi ang pinto at bumaba na sila. Before closing the door, he

lowered himself so I can see him.

“Thank you,” he smiled. “Babawi ako.”

“Oh come on,” I rolled my eyes.

“Good night, crush,” he laughed and closed the door.

Nag-init ang mukha ko dahil sa sinabi niya! Napahawak tuloy ako sa pisngi ko,

dinadama ‘yon. Why the hell would he say that?! Nakakahiya kay Kuya Roel at

narinig pa niya!

“Kuya Roel, he’s not my boyfriend so you don’t need to tell my dad about him,”

I defended myself immediately.

“Wala naman po akong sinasabi, Ma’am,” he chuckled.

“Okay, good. You can report my whereabouts and the people I am with. Just

don’t name them, please?” I asked a favor again.

“Hindi naman po niya hinihingi ang mga pangalan, Ma’am.”

Phew! Buti na lang! Dad knew I have a lot of friends so hindi siguro big deal

sa kanya kapag sinasabi na may kasama akong lalaki. I could be with anyone! I

could be with Austin, the son of his friend, or Wayne, basketball player

namin, or Jon, ka-squad ko. It could be anyone!

I was so tired when I got home kaya pagkatapos mag-shower at skincare,

nakatulog na ‘ko kaagad. Kinabukasan, it was Sunday. Instead of going to the

gym, I decided to walk Jewel, my dog. Exercise na rin ‘yon.

Lumabas ako ng village wearing a white v-neck shirt and pink dolphin shorts.

Hawak-hawak ko ang pink na leash ni Jewel. She was small so mabagal lang ang

lakad ko papunta sa malapit na park sa loob ng village. The village was big.

Madalas tuwing Sunday morning, marami ngang aso na wina-walk. They called the

park a dog park every Sunday.

Umupo ako saglit sa bench ng park at pinainom si Jewel ng water. Pagkatapos,

nilabas ko ang phone ko dahil nag-vibrate.

sevirous: hindi ka mag gygym ngayon?

I laughed.

elydezma: I’m walking my dog.

sevirous: mahilig ka sa aso?

elydezma: Well, yes. Why?

sevirous: woof!

I bit my lower lip and laughed a little. Ang cocorny talaga ng banat nito. I

typed again on my phone, letting Jewel go so she can run around with other

dogs.

elydezma: Are you with Arkin?

sevirous: hindi may schedule siya. si luna kasama ko hahaha

My brows furrowed. Inulit kong basahin para tignan kung mali ba ang

pagkakabasa ko pero wala. Luna. Kasama niya si Luna.

elydezma: Who?

sevirous: luna?

elydezma: Who asked lol

“Excuse me, is that your dog?”

Binaba ko kaagad ang phone ko at tumingin sa lalaking lumapit sa’kin. Sinundan

ko ang tinuturo niya at nakita ko si Jewel, hinahabol na ‘yung batang

tumatakbo. Tumatahol pa! I immediately stood up to catch her.

“Jewel!” I yelled.

I grabbed her by the collar and put her leash back on her. Binuhat ko siya at

pinagalitan habang naglalakad pabalik sa bench.

“Thanks,” I told the guy with a Chow chow, Golden retriever, and a Siberian

husky. “They’re so cute!”

Lumuhod kaagad ako para i-pet sa ulo ‘yung mga aso pero tumahol si Jewel.

Sumimangot ako at umayos ng tayo. Napaka selosa naman!

“Name?” I asked.

“My name’s Cy.”

“I’m asking for the names of the dogs,” I rolled my eyes at him.

“Oh,” he chuckled. “Summer, Maple, Hail,” tinuro niya isa-isa ang mga aso.

Kumaway lang ako sa mga aso at hindi nagawang hawakan dahil tinatahulan ni

Jewel. Umalis na rin ako pagkatapos noon para bumalik sa bahay. Nagugutom na

‘ko, e.

I showered after eating. Humiga ako sa sofa at tinignan ang IG story ni Sevi.

He was really with Luna, pero kasama niya rin si Kierra. It was a mirror shot.

Napairap ako at binaba na ang phone ko para manood na lang ng series.

“Elyse,” napatingin ako kay Mommy nang umupo siya sa tabi ko. “I need to talk

to you about something.”

“Yes, Mommy?” Kinabahan kaagad ako at umayos ng upo.

“Your dad is going to transfer a large amount of his shares to you in the

future,” she held my hand. “Walang matitira sa Kuya mo. I think that’s

unfair.”

“What do you mean, Mommy?” Naguguluhang tanong ko.

“I’m planning to transfer my shares to your brother. Hindi ganoon kalaki

katulad sa’yo but at least he’ll have some. Is that okay to you?” She gave me

a sincere smile.

“M-mom,” I gasped.

I didn’t know what to say!

“Is it too much?” Her smile faded.

“No, Mom. That’s.. That’s so nice of you,” I said with so much admiration. “Of

course it’s fine with me.”

“Are you sure?” She sighed.

My mom had the softest heart in the family, and also the weakest. She was very

considerate. Ang tanging mali niya lang noon ay pumatol siya kay Daddy, not

knowing na may asawa na. Naiintindihan ko si Kuya kung galit siya kay Mommy,

but I wanted him to know that my mom was doing everything for them to be okay.

“Yes. You can do that,” I nodded.

Alam kong hindi interesado si Kuya sa kumpanya, though. He refused to take

business and just proceeded to law. Iyon talaga ang gusto niya.

I rested for a few days because of Undas break. I did not go anywhere dahil

busy sila Daddy. Wala na silang pahinga for work kaya naiiwan ako mag-isa sa

bahay.

sevirous: hoy amora elyse

Napatigil ako sa pag-kain ng popcorn nang mag-message siya. Umirap ako bago

nag-type ng reply.

elydezma: What now

sevirous: punta ako sementeryo

elydezma: Okay?

sevirous: bibisitahin ko ‘yung namatay nating convo

It was so corny but I still laughed! Napatingin tuloy sa’kin ang isang helper namin na nagva-vacuum ng rug. Tinikom ko ang bibig ko para pigilan ang sariling tumawa.

elydezma: What do you want ba epal mo I’m watching Netflix

sevirous: balik mo panyo ko oy

I smiled by myself and remembered his handkerchief. Pinalabhan ko pa ‘yon dahil ginamit ko pamunas ng pawis last time. Swerte niya. May bakas na ng pawis ko ang panyo niya. Gosh.

elydezma: Okay. I’ll just shower.

Tumayo ako kaagad at tumakbo papasok ng kwarto para mag-shower. I stayed in the shower for 20 minutes. Pagkalabas, matagal ko ring pinag-isipan ang susuotin ko habang nakaharap sa salamin.

“I want a manicure,” bulong ko.

In the end, nagsuot na lang ako ng ripped jeans, yellow tube top na pinatungan

ko ng brown Chanel jacket, and then YSL heels. Naka-ponytail ang buhok ko at

naglagay din ng kaunting makeup.

I sprayed perfume on my wrists and neck before getting my yellow sling bag.

Nagpahatid ako kay Kuya Roel sa mall na sinabi ko kay Sevi. I don’t know kung

paano siya pupunta roon pero pumayag pa rin naman siya.

I checked if I had his handkerchief inside my bag. Nalagay ko naman.

“Papasok pa po ba ako, Ma’am?” Kuya Roel teased.

“Uhm.. Y-you can wait in the car, Kuya, or uhm.. You can roam around. Here.

Use my card,” I gave him my card para kapag nagutom siya, pwede siyang kumain.

“Si Ida po kikitain ko.”

“Sige, Ma’am,” he nodded, still smiling.

Hindi ko na dinepensahan ang sarili ko at bumaba na ng kotse, wearing my

shades. Naglakad ako papunta sa milk tea place na pinag-usapan namin ni Sevi.

Nakita ko na siya kaagad doon, nakaupo mag-isa at naglalaro sa phone.

“What’s that?” Tanong ko pagkahatak ng upuan sa harapan niya para roon umupo.

“ML,” he did not even look at me. He was so busy playing.

Tinanggal ko ang shades ko at nilabas ang wallet ko para um-order. Wala pa

siyang milk tea na hawak kaya siguradong hindi pa siya umo-order.

“What’s yours?” I asked.

He did not answer. Ang bilis ng galaw ng daliri niya kakapindot sa phone niya

at mukhang hindi pa ‘ko narinig.

“What’s yours?” I asked again, louder this time.

“Puchaaa,” he looked so frustrated.

Inis kong kinuha ang cellphone niya at pinatay ‘yon. He looked at me with wide

eyes and parted lips na parang pinatay ko ang anak niya sa harapan niya.

“I said, what the fuck is your order?” I hissed.

“Kung ano sa’yo, Eli,” he reached for his phone again.

Irita kong binalik sa kanya ang phone niya bago tumayo at nag-order. Ako pa

talaga ang pinapila niya, ha! Siya ang nauna rito, dapat siya na ang nag-

order. Oh, right! He was too busy with that fucking game kasi!

Inis na inis ako habang nag-oorder. Nang makuha ko ang milk tea, bumalik na

‘ko sa table at padabog na nilapag ‘yung sa kanya sa harapan niya. Padabog din

akong umupo at tinitigan siya nang masama.

Wala siyang pakialam, though. He was still playing.

“I thought hindi mo gusto when people use their phone while eating?” I arched

a brow.

“We’re not eating,” he reasoned out.

Agad nag-init ang ulo ko! Pakiramdam ko umakyat lahat ng dugo sa ulo ko.

Kumukulo pa.

Hindi na ‘ko nagsalita after that. Nilabas ko na lang ang panyo niya at binato

sa pagmumukha niya kaya napatigil siya sa paglalaro.

“Uy,” he laughed at my face. “Malapit na matapos. Wait lang.”

Irita kong kinuha ang milk tea ko at tumayo na para umuwi. Hindi pa ‘ko

nakakalakad paalis, hinawakan na niya ang kamay ko para hatakin pabalik.

“What? Tapos ka na?” Mas lalong tumaas ang kilay ko nang lingunin siya.

He turned off his phone and gave me an apologetic smile.

“Hindi na,” he said calmly. “Pinatay ko na ‘yung phone ko, oh.”

I shouldn’t be drinking milk tea right now, pero dahil nagce-crave daw siya,

pumayag ako! Ugh! ‘Yung diet ko, nawawala na. Lagot ako kay coach.

“What are you getting out of that?” Inis akong umupo ulit sa harapan niya.

“Achievement,” he smirked.

Okay, then. Hindi na lang ako nagsalita and sipped on my milk tea quietly. I stared at him for a moment and realized that he was wearing a navy blue sweater today, black shorts, black sneakers, and black watch. Medyo malamig nga sa mall kaya naka-jacket din ako.

“I’m getting a manicure after this,” I informed him.

“Manicure tayo?” He smiled, excited to involve himself in the narrative.

Ang sabi ko ako lang! Bakit biglang kasama siya?

“Yeah, sumama ka kung gusto mo,” I shrugged.

“Sasama talaga ako!” He was so energetic.

Nang makalahati ang milk tea, tumayo na kami para maglakad-lakad. He was walking slow so I could keep up with him. He looked a little different with a sweater. He should wear sweaters more often, kung hindi mainit.

“Nood ka game namin,” sabi niya bigla habang naglalakad. “Semi-finals.”

“When?” Semi-finals na pala. Ang bilis!

“Wednesday, FEU. Sunday, UP. Ikaw bahala. Kung saan ka available. Basta nood ka.”

“Inuutusan mo ba ‘ko?” Tinaasan ko siya ng kilay.

“Hindi naman. Sinasabi ko lang,” he chuckled. “Manonood din ako ng cheerdance

para suportahan ka.”

“Ako talaga? Hindi ‘yung Salinggawi?” Natatawang sabi ko.

“Shh, baka may makarinig,” he looked around, nervous.

What a traitor!

“Alam ko namang mananalo kami kaya nga ikaw ang susuportahan ko kasi kailangan

mo,” malakas siyang tumawa, tuwang-tuwa sa pang-iinsulto niya.

“Ah, talaga? I hope you lose in basketball,” umirap ako.

“Hindi ‘yan. Nandito ako, e,” pagyayabang niya.

My gosh, nagyayabang na siya sa’kin ngayon, ha!

“Okay, hindi na ‘ko manonood. Sure ka na palang mananalo kayo, e,” I shrugged

casually.

“Hala,” he covered his mouth dramatically. “Hindi ako sure. Walang sure. Uy,

hintayin mo ‘ko, crush!”

Hinabol niya ‘ko kaagad nang binilisan ko ang lakad ko. Tumawa ako at pumasok

na sa loob ng nail salon. Puro babae sa loob pero hindi naman siya puno. The

lady in the counter welcomed us with a smile.

Sevi caught the attention of the women when he went inside, still drinking on

his milk tea. He smiled back at the lady and I literally saw how her cheeks

blushed from that! Napaiwas pa siya ng tingin.

“Ikaw lang po, Ma’am?” She asked me after I pointed at the kind of service

that I want.

“Pati siya,” hinatak ko si Sevi sa braso.

“Upo na po kayo, Ma’am and Sir.”

Sumunod sa’kin si Sevi papasok sa loob. Umupo ako sa comfortable couch at sa

tabi ko naman si Sevi. He was looking around like an innocent kid, namamangha

dahil ngayon lang nakapasok sa ganito.

Nakita kong nag-unahan pa ‘yung dalawang babae kung sino ang magse-serve kay

Sevi. Napairap tuloy ako at sumandal na lang hanggang sa may pumunta nang

babae sa’kin.

“I can watch sa Sunday. May training kami sa Wednesday,” lumingon ako kay

Sevi.

“Kuhanan kita ng ticket,” Sevi nodded. “Wear a tiger shirt.”

“Huh?” My brows furrowed. “I’ll wear maroon, duh.”

“Wag kasi!” Reklamo niya.

I laughed at him when he started acting like a kid. Akala mo naman inagawan

siya ng candy.

“Ganito na lang. Kapag nagsuot ka ng tiger shirt sa game, magsusuot ako ng

green sa cheerdance. Deal?”

He was so impulsive. Nakita kong pinagsisihan niya kaagad ang sinabi niya kaya

napangisi ako.

“You’ll wear green?” I repeated.

“Hindi, wag na pala-”

“No, sinabi mo na, e,” I cut him off. “Deal! Deal!”

“No deal. No deal,” he countered.

Masama ko siyang tinignan at hindi inalis ang tingin hangga’t hindi siya

pumapayag. Napabuntong-hininga siya at napailing.

“Hindi ba pwedeng.. yellow green suot ko?” He tried to negotiate.

I giggled at his offer. What the hell!

“Ano ka, mangga?” I laughed again.

“Sige. Eto final na. Yellow pants at green shirt,” pagbibiro niya.

Natawa ako ulit dahil naisip ang itsura niya. Yellow pants! Mukha siyang tanga

sa isipan ko. Panigurado pagtatawanan din siya ng iba kapag ganoon nga ang

sinuot niya.

“Ang cute niyo po, Ma’am and Sir,” sabi bigla ng babaeng naglilinis ng kuko

ko. “Ang saya saya niyo po ng boyfriend mo.”

Napatigil tuloy ako sa pagtawa ko!

“He’s not my boyf-”

“Salamat, Ate. Tuwang tuwa talaga sa’kin girlfriend ko, ‘no? Hay,” Sevi

sighed. “Benta talaga ng jokes ko. Bentang benta rin kay Mama.”

The lady giggled, mukhang naintindihan ang reference. Ako, hindi! I pouted and

rolled my eyes. Sila na ang masaya ngayon.

Sevi took a stolen selfie of us and posted it on his IG story. Binato ko

kaagad siya ng box ng tissue sa gilid nang makita ‘yon.

“Ang pangit ko roon!” Reklamo ko.

“Hindi naman, ah,” he showed me the photo again. “Ang cute mo nga, e. Para

kang baby sealion.”

“You little fuck-”

“Ate, nagmumura, oh,” pagsusumbong niya.

Walang ginawa si Sevi kung hindi inisin ako buong manicure session. Imbis

tuloy na marelax ako, mas na-stress ako! My gosh. Next time, hindi ko na siya

isasama sa salon at lalo na sa spa. When I’m with him, my blood pressure goes

up.

Pagkalabas namin sa nail salon, I felt like my age doubled. Sinamaan ko kaagad

ng tingin si Sevi.

“You’re stressing me out. We really can’t be in the same room for hours,”

inismiran ko siya.

“Bakit naman tayo kukuha ng kwarto?” He raised his brows.

“H-huh?!” Hinampas ko kaagad siya. It sounded so wrong!

Naglakad na ‘ko ulit at sumunod naman siya sa’kin. Nang mapadaan sa cinema, I

pointed at the ‘Coming Soon’ poster. I really wanted to watch that movie.

Hindi pa nga lang siya showing.

“That’s a good movie,” I told him.

“Hindi pa nga showing?” Naguguluhang sabi niya.

“The trailer was good!”

He suddenly looked at me and crossed his arms over his chest. He licked his

lower lip a little and tilted his head to the side, figuring out something.

“Inaaya mo ba ‘ko manood ng sine?” He bit his lower lip to hide a smile.

“W-what?!” I panicked. “I’m just saying na it’s a good mo-”

“Grabe, Elyse!” He dramatically covered his mouth. “Bakit hindi mo na lang

sinabi nang diretso? Sevi, nood tayo ng sine, o kaya Sev, date tayo sa cinema.

Papayag naman ako, e. Tsk.”

“Alam mo, kadiri ka!” Inis ko siyang tinalikuran at naglakad paalis.

I suddenly stopped when I saw a familiar face. Nanlaki ang mga mata ko at

hindi kaagad nakagalaw.

“Kuya!” Gulat na sabi ko nang mapatingin siya sa’kin.

Kumunot kaagad ang noo niya, nagtataka kung bakit ako nandito sa mall.

Napalingon ako kay Sevi na may kausap sa phone. Buti na lang!

“Elyse,” gulat din siya. “Bakit ka nandito?”

“Uhm, I was just.. Uhm.. Shopping! Boring kasi sa bahay, e! I also had a

manicure. Look!” Pinakita ko pa ang kuko ko sa kanya.

“Oh,” tumango siya at tumingin sa paligid.

“Ikaw? What are you doing here?” It was my turn to ask.

“Huh?” He couldn’t even answer!

Mas lalong sumingkit ang mga mata ko sa kanya. I mean, pareho kaming malayo sa

mall na ‘to so bakit namin dadayuhin ‘to, right? I thought busy siya sa

readings niya?

“Wala, I’m looking for a specific book,” he answered without looking at me.

“I’ll go now.”

Kumaway ako sa kanya nang maglakad na siya sa ibang direksyon. Saktong-sakto

lumapit sa’kin si Sevi kung kailan wala na si Kuya.

“Sino ‘yon?” Nagtatakang tanong niya.

“Sinong kausap mo sa phone?” I asked back.

“Wala, si Ke lang,” he chuckled. “Bakit? Nagseselos ka?”

Umiling kaagad ako sa kanya. Tumawa lang ulit siya at sumunod na sa’kin sa

paglalakad. Wala na ‘kong mapuntahan and Kuya Roel has my card so I can’t go

shopping. I stopped walking and looked at Sevi who suddenly stopped walking,

too.

“Bakit?” Nagtatakang tanong niya.

“The movie,” I remembered.

“Anong movie?” He asked again. “‘Yung tinuro mo kanina?”

Tumango ako sa kanya.

“O, anong mayroon?”

I bit my lower lip and looked away, finding the right words to say. Gosh, why

can’t I just say it?

“Ano?” Pangungulit niya.

“Let’s watch that,” I looked at him.

He stared at me for a moment before letting out an amused smile. He put his

tongue on the insides of his cheek, trying to hide the smile.

“Date?” He asked.

“Whatever you call it,” nagkibit-balikat ako at tinalikuran na siya sa hiya.

:)

09

“Saan ka pupunta, Eli? Uwi ka na? Bye!”

Nagmamadali kong kinuha ang gamit ko, hindi pa nakakapagpalit ng shirt. I

waved at Ate Raya and others before leaving. Nilabas ko ang phone ko at

nakitang 10:30 PM na. It was Wednesday night and Sevi messaged me to say that

he’ll be waiting for me after my training.

Huminto ako sa kakatakbo at kakahanap sa kanya nang makita siyang nakaupo sa

may steps ng hagdan malapit sa pinagte-trainingan namin. He stood up when he

saw me. Umiinom pa siya ng ice tubig or something.

“I told you, let’s just meet sa Sunday before the game,” sabi ko kaagad

pagkalapit ko. “So you won’t have to wait here. It’s almost 11 PM!”

Tumayo siya at napakamot sa ulo niya dahil sa sermon ko. “Okay lang. Huwag

kang magalit.”

“Anyway,” I sighed. “Congratulations.”

May laban sila kanina sa FEU and they won! Nabalitaan ko lang sa Twitter pero

hindi ako nakanood dahil may training kami. He wanted to give me the tickets

and the shirt today but this was my only free time. Busy ako buong araw.

“Thank you. Sana makapasok sa finals,” he smiled at me.

I noticed that he was still wearing his jersey shorts but he changed his shirt

into white. Mukhang hindi pa umuuwi galing sa game.

“Mabigat ba? Akin na,” kinuha niya ang duffel bag ko kahit may backpack siyang

dala.

“Kuya Roel’s waiting in the parking but.. Uh, we can get him food?”

“May bukas na fastfood dyan,” tumango siya at naglakad na.

Sumunod ako sa kanya, lumalayo dahil nacoconscious ako kung amoy pawis ba ‘ko

dahil kakagaling ko lang sa training. My eyes widened when he put his hand on

my shoulder to pull me closer to him because of the bicycle.

Agad akong lumayo sa kanya nang makadaan ang bicycle. I looked away, feeling

awkward now.

“Bakit ba ang layo mo?” Kumunot na ang noo niya.

“I think I smell like sweat,” I bit my lower lip and looked at him.

Lumapit siya sa’kin ulit kaya napaatras ako. I stiffened when he leaned on my

neck and sniffed on it a little. I felt his breath on it. The tip of his

perfect nose almost touched my jaw!

“Hindi naman, ah,” sabi niya nang umayos na ulit ng tayo. “Amoy pabango.”

“Anong pabango pala?” I tried to ask while walking.

“Johnsons baby cologne?”

Agad ko siyang hinampas sa braso kaya napailag siya at humawak pa rin sa braso

niya kahit dumaplis lang naman. He laughed and walked faster so I wouldn’t

catch him.

“Sige, bench body spray,” hula niya ulit.

“It’s Jo Malone!” I pouted.

Hinabol ko siya at huminto naman siya sa paglalakad para makaabot sa’kin.

Pagkatapos, sabay na ulit kaming naglakad papunta sa McDo.

Pagkapasok namin, humanap na kaagad ako ng table at siya na ang nag-prisintang

um-order. Nagpahalumbaba ako habang nagiiscroll sa phone ko. I opened my

Instagram and stole a video of him to post on my IG story. I zoomed it on his

back while he was talking to the cashier and captioned it ‘Straight from the

game’.

Kaso naka close friends lang. Kaunti lang ang nasa close friends ko. Hindi rin

makikita ni Sevi dahil hindi siya kasama sa list. I smirked.

Nagulat ako nang ilapag na ni Sevi ang tray sa table. I looked at him and

noticed that he was thinking about something.

“What?” I asked him.

“Kapatid ba ni Jo Malone si Post Malone?” Sumingkit ang mga mata niya.

“Shut the hell up,” I massaged my head. Sumakit ang ulo ko sa banat niya.

“E, si Hoe?” Tanong niya ulit.

“What?”

“Hoe Malone?” Then he laughed at his own joke.

Natawa ako dahil nakakatawa ang tawa niya, not because of the joke! He laughed

more because I laughed a little, tinuro pa ang mukha ko. Napairap ako at

kinuha na lang ang paper bag ng food para kay Kuya Roel saka tinabi ‘yon sa

gilid.

“Akala ko sa’yo ‘yon? Hindi ka kakain?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“I’m not allowed to eat fastfood,” I sighed.

Binuksan niya ang burger niya at inabot sa’kin. Umiling kaagad ako at nilayo

ang mukha ko roon para hindi madikit sa bibig ko.

“I can’t!” Inis na sabi ko sa kanya.

“Kahit kaunti lang? Kahit kagat lang?” Pagpupumilit niya.

“Ugh, fine,” I leaned over the table to take a bite on his burger.

“Nice,” he smirked.

“Happy?” I said with my mouth full.

He smiled and nodded with so much satisfaction from what he did. It was like

he unlocked a new level in the game. Umirap ako at kinuha ang jug ko para

uminom ng tubig doon.

“Ah, oo nga pala, baka makalimutan ko,” kinuha niya ang bag niya at nilabas

ang paper bag na lukot doon saka binigay sa’kin.

Kinuha ko ‘yon at binuksan to see the tiger shirt inside. It was a different

shirt this time. Iba ang design, like it was made specifically for basketball

games. Go UST Growling Tigers ang nakalagay. It was on his size so malaki

nanaman sa’kin.

Sa loob ng rolled shirt, naroon ang dalawang tickets for the game this Sunday.

I thought isa lang ang kukuhanin niya. He probably remembered what I said last

time. Ha! Walang kawala si Ida! Isasama ko siya kahit ayaw niya!

“Thanks,” I smiled and put the paper bag inside my duffel.

“Panoorin natin ‘yung movie after the game?” He remembered.

“Uhm, okay. I’ll.. get us tickets,” I offered.

“Gabi nga lang ako pwede.”

Tumango ako at chineck na ang phone para sa available time para sa showing

date. Maraming manonood for sure kaya bibili na ‘ko online just to reserve

tickets. Sana manalo sila sa game para maganda ang mood niya.

Pagkatapos niya kumain, naglakad na kami pabalik sa kung saan nakapark si Kuya

Roel. Huminto na siya sa paglalakad para magpaalam bago pa kami makita.

“See you sa Sunday,” he gave me a smile.

“Yeah,” tumango ako at tinalikuran na siya.

“Elyse!” He called again kaya napalingon ako.

“What?!”

“Ingat,” he smiled more.

Umirap ako at naglakad na papunta sa kotse. Nakita ko si Kuya Roel na nakatayo

roon at nagcecellphone. Nilabas ko ang paper bag ng McDo at binigay sa kanya

para makakain siya.

“Pag-uwi na lang, Ma’am,” he smiled at me. “Mukhang natagalan po kayo, ah.”

“U-uhm, yeah. I bought you food sa McDo,” pagdadahilan ko.

Hindi siya nagsalita pero natawa siya sa sinabi ko. Pinagbuksan niya ‘ko ng

pinto at umikot para sumakay sa driver’s seat.

When I went home, tulog na ang lahat kaya tahimik na lang akong umakyat sa

kwarto ko para mag-shower at matulog. The next day, balik nanaman ako sa daily

routine ko. Walang masyadong nangyayari sa’kin except noong Saturday when I

fell during training.

“Elyse! Are you okay?” Lumapit kaagad si Ate Raya sa’kin.

I held my knee and stretched my leg in pain. It was painful because I came

from the air and then they failed to maintain their balance when they tried to

catch my fall so my knee hit the mat. Good thing we were on a mat.

“It’s fine. I think I’ll just get a bruise,” I stood up and stretched my leg

again.

“Let me see,” lumapit si coach para tignan.

He reminded me about my safety and also how to avoid a bruise. Tumango lang

ako at bumalik na sa training kahit medyo masakit ang binti ko. Pag uwi ko,

pinahinga ko na lang ‘yon at nilagyan ng yelo saglit.

The next morning, the bruise really showed but it was better than I expected.

I decided not to go to the gym or even walk my dog because of it. Nagpahinga

na lang ako at naligo para maghanda sa game mamaya.

“Good noon! Good noon!” Napatalon ako sa kinauupuan ko nang pumasok bigla si

Ida sa kwarto ko.

“Where the hell did you get that?” I pointed at her tiger shirt.

“I bought one, duh!” Tumawa siya at umupo sa kama ko habang ako, nagpapatuyo

ng buhok gamit ang blower. “Also, look! Marami pa ‘kong nakuha!”

Pinatay ko saglit ang blower para lumingon sa kanya. She was holding a

cartolina and also a yellow bandana. Tumayo siya at binuksan ang cartolina sa

harapan ko.

‘GO UST GROWLING TIGERS!

KAYA NATIN ‘TO!’

“Ida, what the hell!” Agad akong umiwas ng tingin. “Ang traydor mo!”

“It’s okay, wala namang La Salle sa semi-finals so I’m choosing to support UST

this time. Because of you na rin since you support the captain. I support

you!” Ang dami niyang sinabi. “Uh, I should have put Sevi’s name here, huh?”

“Wag na!” Pigil ko kaagad.

Pagkatapos magpatuyo ng buhok, tumayo na ‘ko at pumunta sa walk-in closet para

maghanap ng susuotin. I was just wearing a robe.

I decided to wear white lazy shorts since nilagyan ko ng bandage ang binti ko

to help ease the swelling and to avoid direct contact if ever matamaan pero

hindi ko hinigpitan dahil mas lalo lang mamamaga.

Tinuck-in ko ang shirt ni Sevi at sinuot na rin ang yellow bandana ni Ida. I

tied it on my hair like a headband kaya may ribbon sa ulo ko. Naka white

sneakers lang din ako at dala ang white kong body bag.

“Anong nangyari dyan?” Nag-alala kaagad si Ida nang makita ang bandage sa

binti ko.

“I fell during training,” I explained. “It will heal in 2 weeks, I guess. It’s

not that bad.”

Pagkatapos kong mag-ayos, bumaba na kami ni Ida sa living room. Hindi ko

ineexpect na maaabutan ko si Mommy doon. I thought she was at work!

“M-mom,” humalik ako sa pisngi niya.

“Oh, where are you going?” Nagtatakang tanong ni Mommy at tinignan ang shirts

naming dalawa. “What? Did you transfer schools?”

“We’re just.. going to watch a basketball game,” kinakabahang sabi ko.

“You’re supporting UST instead of La Salle?” She was so confused.

“Ah, Tita! Hindi nakapasok ang La Salle sa final four so we decided to support

UST na lang! They’re good! If you want, you can watch the livestream later-”

“Ida,” pigil ko sa kanya.

“Really?” My mom smiled. “Okay, then. Goodluck to the both of you.”

“Goodluck po sa captain ng U-S-Ouch!” Napahawak si Ida sa bewang niya nang

kurutin ko siya.

“Aalis na po kami,” humalik ulit ako sa pisngi niya at lumabas na para

magpahatid kay Kuya Roel. Good thing it was my mom who caught me leaving!

Pahirapan pa kapag si Daddy. Buti na lang talaga at busy siya sa company.

When we arrived at Araneta, pumapasok na ang mga naka-maroon at naka-yellow.

Ida went to someone and asked for a balloon. Napasapo ako sa noo ko at hinatak

na siya papunta sa loob para hanapin ang seats namin.

“Oh my god, ang lapit natin!” Hinampas ako ni Ida. “Sevi really gave us the

best seats, huh.”

“Shut up, Ida,” I rolled my eyes and took my seat.

Sobrang lapit nga namin sa court. I could probably see the sweat of the

players, pero ang inaalala ko ay baka naman matamaan ako ng bola rito! Takot

pa naman ako sa bola.

Naroon na ang players. I saw Sevi sitting on the bench, talking to his

teammates. He was wearing their yellow jersey and again, black knee support.

Ganoon na ata ang outfit niya palagi. He really looked like a basketball

player, lalo na kapag nakatayo dahil sa height and posture.

“Go Sevi!” Sigaw bigla ni Ida.

“What the hell, Ida,” hinampas ko siya sa binti.

Dahil sa sigaw niya, napalingon tuloy si Sevi sa amin. His lips slowly formed

a smile when he saw me. Tumayo siya at tinapik ang balikat ng kausap niya bago

tumalikod at naglakad papunta sa side namin. Nanlaki ang mga mata ko at hindi

alam kung ano ang gagawin.

Hanggang doon lang siya sa harang at hindi na makakapasok kaya sinenyasan niya

‘kong bumaba. Bumaba ako sa steps at lumapit sa may railings.

“What?” I asked him and looked around. Some people were already watching!

“Anong nangyari dyan?” Seryosong tanong niya at tinignan ang binti ko.

“I fell,” tinaas ko saglit ang binti ko para ipakita sa kanya ang bandage.

“Tsk,” umiling siya, nakasandal ang dalawang braso sa railings. “Dapat kasi

sa’kin ka lang mahulog.”

“Huh?!” Gulat na sabi ko at hinampas siya sa braso.

Tumawa siya at hinawakan ang baba ko para makita nang maayos ang mukha ko.

Tiningala ko siya at tinaasan ng kilay, naghahamon.

“Walang good luck dyan?” Tanong niya.

“Good luck,” inalis ko ang hawak niya sa baba ko at sinamaan siya ng tingin.

“Thanks. This one’s for you and the team,” he playfully winked at me.

I bit the insides of my cheek to hide a smile. Napangiti rin siya at natawa

nang makitang pinipigilan ko ang ngiti ko. I glared at him when he pinched my

cheek.

“Sige na, bumalik ka na,” he was still smiling.

Tumango ako at tinalikuran na siya para umakyat ulit sa seat ko. Some

Thomasians were already watching me! Napaiwas tuloy ako ng tingin at hiyang-

hiyang umupo sa upuan ko. Ida was taking a video! Agad kong tinakpan ang

camera.

“Oh my gosh, you guys are so cute,” hinampas pa niya ‘ko sa braso habang

pinapanood ang video niya.

What the hell, we looked like a couple in the video! Nakatalikod ako at

nakangiti si Sevi sa’kin, titig na titig. He was slightly laughing, too. We

were like flirting.

“Ate, boyfriend mo?” May kumalabit sa’kin sa likuran.

“What?” Lumingon ako sa dalawang babaeng naka tiger shirt.

“Si Sevi po. Ikaw po ba ‘yung girlfriend niya?” The other one who was holding

a balloon asked.

“No!” Tanggi ko kaagad at hindi na sila pinansin.

Ano namang pakialam nila? Admirers maybe. Ang heartthrob naman pala ni Sevi sa

UST. I sarcastically laughed at that.

I focused myself on the game when it started. Todo cheer na kaagad si Ida at

sumasabay sa cheers ng Thomasian crowd, pero hindi rin niya napipigilan ang

sariling sumabay sa UP.

“U! NIBERSIDAD! NG PILIPINAS! U! NIBERSIDAD! NG PILIPINAS!” Ida cheered.

“Ida, choose your damn team,” hinatak ko na siya paupo.

“Hindi, UST pa rin! Go USTE!” Nilabas niya ang cartolina at winagayway. “Eli,

cheer ka naman!”

Hindi ko siya pinansin at nanood na lang. It was a good start for UST dahil

sila kaagad ang nakalamang. Sevi was doing so good. I could almost hear him

instructing his teammates. He looked serious and nervous.

Naagaw niya ang bola sa UP at nagmamadaling tumakbo papunta sa kabilang side,

and then he passed it on his teammate. His teammate was blocked so Sevi raised

his arms again after changing his position.

“Eli, cheer ka!” Hinatak ako patayo ni Ida nang makuha ni Sevi ang bola.

“Go UST!” I yelled.

Three points from Camero!

Nagsigawan ang crowd at nag-cheer ulit. Sevi looked at our side and smiled

before running again towards the other side, instructing his teammate to go to

the open space.

First quarter was in favor of UST, pero nagkakapalitan na sila ng scores sa

second and third. Sa fourth na talaga uminit ang laban. The people were

already standing to cheer louder. It was so intense.

I saw how tired Sevi was. Nagpahinga siya kanina pero nakabalik na siya

ngayong fourth quarter. He was so smooth with the ball, like it was his

bestfriend.

“Ay!” Umilag kaagad si Ida nang lumipad ‘yung bola papunta sa side namin

pagkapasa.

I knew it! Matatamaan kami rito! Akala ko sa volleyball lang nangyayari ‘yon!

Sevi looked at our side and gave me a subtle thumbs up to ask kung okay lang

ako. I nodded and gave him back a thumbs up. He chuckled and directed his attention back to the game.

“Let’s Go! U-S-T Let’s go fight! U-S-T Let’s go fight! U-S-T Let’s go fight!”

The crowd cheered.

Napatayo na ‘ko sa sobrang nerbyos sa game. Kaunting oras na lang ang natitira. Lamang sila but who knows if mahahabol ng UP, right? I bit my finger when UP was given a free throw chance because of foul.

“Yes,” I whispered when the ball failed to go in.

Nagtayuan ang lahat nang marinig ang buzzer. I stood up and cheered too.

Nagyakapan kami ni Ida at tumalon-talon pa sa saya.

“They won!” I said, correcting what we said last time.

“Your boyfriend’s team won!” She smirked at me.

Umirap ako at narealize na hawak-hawak ko pala ang balloon. Sobrang saya nila at nagyakapan pa. Nagpupunas si Sevi ng pawis gamit ang towel niya nang tawagin sila ng coach nila.

“Tara na?” Aya ko kay Ida.

“Lapitan mo muna!” Tulak niya.

“No! Busy siya!” Sinubukan kong umakyat ulit sa steps pero hinaharangan ni Ida

ang dadaanan ko. “Come on! Magkikita naman kami mamaya!”

“Oh my god,” she covered her mouth. “Date?! May date kayo!”

“Shut up,” I looked away.

Nilabas ko na lang ang phone ko at tinext siya na mauuna na ‘ko sa mall. I

didn’t receive his reply until we dropped Ida off in front of her house.

From: Sevi

7 PM nandon na ‘ko hahaha

Dahil hinatid ko pa si Ida, inabot pa ‘ko ng traffic on my way to the mall.

The movie was scheduled at 8:15 PM pa naman kaya marami pa ‘kong spare time. I

was just worried about Sevi. Malamang nandoon na ‘yon.

Kakababa ko pa lang ng kotse nang sagutin ang tawag ni Sevi.

[Saan ka na?] Bungad niya.

“Here na! Kakababa ko lang!” Nagmamadali akong pumasok sa loob at sumakay sa

escalator para umakyat sa cinema.

[Huwag kang magmadali. ‘Yung binti mo.] He reminded me.

“It’s fine. I’m almost there.”

Nakita ko na siya kaagad sa tapat ng cinema. He was wearing a black shirt and

a denim jacket partners with a pair of ripped jeans. Suot niya ulit ang silver

necklace niya at silver na watch. His height made his outfit look so much

better.

He raised his hand and smiled when he saw me. Binaba ko na ang phone at

naglakad palapit sa kanya. I already had our tickets on my phone kaya hindi na

kailangan pumila. Inaya ko na lang siya bumili ng popcorn and drinks.

“Libre ko. Ano sa’yo?” Tanong niya.

“Water lang. Hindi ko mauubos ang popcorn.”

I looked so small beside him! Tinignan muna ako nung lalaki sa cashier bago

binalik ang tingin kay Sevi.

“Basketball player kayo, Sir?” Tanong nung lalaki.

“Ah, oo, Kuya,” Sevi said while getting his wallet.

“Ang tangkad mo, Sir, tapos medyo maliit ‘yung girlfriend niyo. Hehe,” the guy

laughed awkwardly after insulting me!

“Excuse me?” Tumaas kaagad ang kilay ko.

Tumawa kaagad si Sevi sa insulto sa’kin at inabot ang bayad. Hindi pa rin siya

matigil sa kakatawa lalo na nang tignan niya ‘ko mula ulo hanggang paa,

realizing our height difference.

“Hindi ka naman masyadong maliit, ah,” he put his hand on the top of my head.

“Sakto lang para sa’kin.”

“Whatever!” I rolled my eyes and crossed my arms over my chest.

“Badtrip ka, Kuya. Galit na tuloy pati sa’kin,” Sevi talked to the cashier

guy, still laughing. “Aawayin na ‘ko nito.”

“Cute naman, Ma’am! Huwag kang mag-alala!” Bawi nung cashier.

Sumimangot ako at kinuha na ang water bottle na inabot niya. Si Sevi, kinuha

ang softdrinks at popcorn bago umalis sa pila. Pwede nang pumasok kaya

dumiretso na kami sa loob ng sinehan.

“Dapat pala magkalayong seat ‘yung nireserve ko,” sabi ko sa kanya pagkaupo

namin.

“Luh, date nga, e. Dapat magkatabi tayo,” he smirked.

Hindi ko siya pinansin at sumandal na lang. Nilagay niya ang cup niya sa may

left side niya dahil ako ang nakaupo sa right side. Nilipat niya ang water

bottle ko sa right side ko para i-angat ang pagitan sa gitna namin.

“What?” I asked nervously.

Nilagay niya ang popcorn sa gitna.

“‘Yung popcorn kasi. Kabado ka masyado,” he laughed.

I shifted on my seat when the movie started. Sevi was quiet now. Nakafocus na

rin siya sa pinapanood namin. It was more like a sci-fi movie na mapapaisip ka

kaya nga tutok na tutok siya.

“Uy, math,” he whispered and pointed at the equations.

“Okay, smart-ass,” I rolled my eyes.

Nilalamig na ‘ko. Nakatapat pa ang aircon sa inuupuan namin so I could feel

the cold air directly on my skin. I rubbed my hands together and sighed.

Napatingin si Sevi sa’kin.

“Malamig ba?” He asked me.

“It’s fine.”

He didn’t buy that, though. Umayos siya ng upo at hinubad ang denim jacket

niya para ibigay sa’kin. My god, pakiramdam ko ako ang nasa movie, e! It was

corny but it was a nice gesture kaya tinanggap ko na rin at sinuot.

Naiwan pa ang body warmth niya sa jacket kaya mabilis nawala ang lamig na

nararamdaman ko. He was left in a plain black shirt. Hindi ba siya lalamigin

doon?

“Popcorn,” alok niya sa’kin.

Kumuha ako at nilagay sa bibig ko, hindi inaalis ang tingin sa screen. The scene was so intense. Bumalik tuloy ang lamig na nararamdaman ko!

I held my hands together to warm them a bit but Sevi suddenly pulled on my left wrist to break my hands apart. I looked at him with wide eyes when he intertwined our hands together.

“What are you doing,” I whispered on him.

“Ang lamig, e,” he chuckled.

Naramdaman ko ang init ng kamay niya kaya hindi na ‘ko nag-reklamo. Na-guilty din ako na nilalamig siya dahil binigay niya ang jacket niya sa’kin. Tinago ko na lang ang isang kamay ko sa loob ng jacket para hindi malamigan.

But I couldn’t focus on the film! I was thinking about his hand on mine!

“What did he say? Did you get it?” Tanong ko kay Sevi.

“Nago-orbit kasi ‘yung planet sa black hole. ‘Yung black hole, winawarp niya ‘yung spacetime. Theory of relativity ni Einstein. Kapag mas malaki ‘yung object, mas warped at twisted ‘yung spacetime. ‘Yung black hole, sobrang laki o lawak ng circumference kaya ‘yung spacetime-”

“Stop. Later na,” I cut him off.

He laughed and focused on the film again. Inalis ko saglit ang kamay ko sa

hawak niya para kumuha ng wipes sa bag para sa kamay ko dahil sa popcorn.

After that, he held it again. Nanahimik na lang ako at sumandal sa upuan ko.

The movie was mindblowing. It was so mindblowing that I was still thinking

about it even after leaving the cinema. Sevi was explaining some concepts to

me. Puro science.

“Yeah, I get it. I get it,” tumango ako.

“Saan na tayo nyan?” Tanong niya habang naglalakad. “Tara arcade!”

Pumayag ako sa gusto niya at sumunod na lang sa kanya papunta sa timezone.

Pinaloadan niya ang card niya at nag-ambag naman ako roon. I pointed at the

basketball game first. Matagal ko nang gustong i-try ‘yun.

He tapped the card on it and pushed a button to let me play. Sumandal siya sa

gilid ko at pinanood akong maglaro. He crossed his arms over his chest and

pushed his tongue on the insides of his cheek to hide his smile.

Kinuha ko ang bola at sunod-sunod na shinoot ‘yon, determined to have a high

score but the ball just won’t go inside the damn net! Inis kong binato ang

bola at tumama sa ring so it bounced on it.

Hinarang kaagad ni Sevi ang kamay niya sa bola para hindi ako matamaan. I

pouted and looked at him, asking for help.

“Isa pa, isa pa,” sabi niya at tinap ulit ang card.

Kumuha siya ng bola at pinahawak sa’kin. He positioned himself on my back and

guided my hand.

“‘Yan. Ganyan,” binitawan niya ‘ko at pinanood ako ulit.

The ball went in! Kumuha ulit ako ng bago at shinoot pero hindi na pumasok.

Tinawanan nanaman ako ni Sevi. Napakayabang!

Kinuha niya ang bola at tinulungan akong mag-shoot. Lahat ng sa kanya,

pumapasok. Maybe basketball wasn’t really for me. Taga-cheer na lang talaga

ako.

Kinuha niya ang tickets at lumipat na kami sa ibang games. I was so

competitive, lalo na sa tekken. I think Sevi was purposely doing bad so I

could win. He was so relaxed with it.

“Loser!” Tuwang-tuwang sabi ko nang matalo nanaman siya.

“Yeah, yeah,” tumango siya, walang pakialam.

We played the car racing din and deal or no deal until we decided to trade our

tickets. Natalo kami sa deal or no deal because of him! I told him not to pick

brief case number 21 but he still did!

“I told you!” Inis na sabi ko. “Why did you pick that?!”

“Birthday mo ‘yun, e,” he reasoned out.

Nawala tuloy ang galit ko. Paano niya naman nalaman na birthday ko ‘yun? This

stalker!

“Malay ko bang malas ang birthday mo,” at tumawa siya nang malakas.

Bumalik lang tuloy ang inis ko! Siniko ko siya at tinalikuran na para maghanap

ng ibang laro. After trading the tickets, lumabas na kami dahil magsasara na

ang mall. I texted Kuya Roel to pick me up at the entrance. The mall had a

garden so we just sat there while waiting.

“Thanks for today,” I looked down and played with my hands.

“You’re welcome.”

I looked at him and noticed his silver necklace. Palagi niyang suot ‘yon at

nakatago sa loob ng shirt niya so I was curious about the design.

“Can I see your necklace?” I asked.

Hinatak niya ‘yung necklace niya at nilabas mula sa shirt para makita ko. It

was just his initials. SVC.

“Who gave you that?” I arched a brow. “Luna?”

His eyes widened with the mention of his friend’s name. He stared at me for a

moment before he bursted out laughing.

“Ako lang nagpagawa nito,” he showed it to me. “No special meaning.”

Tumango lang ako at umiwas ng tingin, slightly embarrased for mentioning

Luna’s name again. Napabalik lang ang tingin ko sa kanya nang kuhanin niya ang

kamay ko at nilapag ang necklace doon.

“Why are you giving this to me?” I asked nervously.

“Para may special meaning na,” he smiled.

“Am I special to you?” I raised my brows.

He nodded, licking his lower lip a little.

“Why? Do you like me?” My heart was beating so fast.

His lips slowly formed an amused smile, hindi man lang nagulat sa tanong ko.

“Hindi ba halata?” He asked me back.

:)

10

“Ida, I have a problem.”

Ida looked back at me while we were eating our salad in our seats, waiting for

our prof. Ang sabi niya male-late daw siya so we'll just use this time to eat.

"What? Are you okay?" Ida was so worried.

"Okay, so," inusog ko ang upuan ko at humarap sa kanya para marinig niya nang

maayos. "I have a friend, and my friend just received a confession from

someone. She did not say anything after the confession because dumating na

'yung driver niya but.. like.. What should my friend do?"

Ida arched a brow and pulled her chair closer to me so we would kind of have a

privacy.

"Does your friend like the guy?" She asked.

"Well," I looked away, getting nervous. "My.. My friend.. Uhm.. She haven't..

like.. thought about it?"

"Well, your friend needs to think about it," Ida nodded.

"My friend is scared because her dad is strict," I looked down and played with

my hands.

"Oh, come on. Didn't you know? The more you avoid someone, the more your

feelings go deep. Address it and give in! You can deal with your dad later!”

She seemed so excited.

“It’s not me! It’s my friend!” I panicked immediately.

“I’m the only friend you really consider as a friend! Shut up!” She laughed.

“I have other friends! Sila Ate Helen!” I still tried to defend myself.

“They’re your brother’s friends!”

Sumimangot ako at pinatong ang dalawang siko sa arm chair saka tinakpan ang

mukha sa sobrang frustration. Why would Sevi confess like that?! Hindi ko na

tuloy alam ang gagawin ko! I became so confused and awkward!

“But.. Oh my god, who confessed? Sevi?!” Ida tried to take my hands off my

face. “Oh come on! I know you like him!”

“I don’t!” Tanggi ko kaagad.

“Elyse, trust me. I know you better than you know yourself,” Ida laughed

hysterically. “I mean, kung ako rin naman! I would fall for that guy! He’s

so.. dreamy! A boyfriend material. Gosh.”

“So you like him?” Seryosong tanong ko at tinaasan siya ng kilay.

“No! But see?! See that?! Your reaction! You’re getting so jealous agad! You

really like him!” Ida pointed at my face. “Come on! Admit that you like him!

Secret lang natin, dali! Though matagal ko nang alam.”

“Fine, oh my god! I like him, okay?!” I yelled so loud that the room turned

silent.

Nanlaki ang mata ko at nilibot ang paningin ko sa blockmates ko only to see

them looking at me, smiling. I immediately put my hands in front of me and

shook it so they won’t get the wrong idea!

“Si Eli, lumalovelife!” Sigaw ng blockmate ko.

“Oh my god, no! No, guys!” I tried to deny but they wouldn’t listen to me!

They started teasing me about it! Mabuti na lang at dumating na ang prof kaya

tumahimik sila. I inhaled a large amount of breath and massaged my head out of

frustration. Ida was just laughing beside me.

It was Wednesday around 7 PM while the whole squad was eating dinner when I

messaged Sevi to congratulate him for making it to the finals. Hindi ako

nakanood dahil Wednesday and may training kami. Bawat panalo nila sa

basketball, kinakabahan ako dahil mas nalalapit ang cheerdance competition.

To: Sevi

Congrats, Sebastian.

“Pasok UST! Kalaban nila ‘yung Ateneo sa finals,” pinag-uusapan din nila Ate

Mae.

“Really? Sayang, we can’t watch. We have training,” Ate Raya pouted.

Nalungkot din ako dahil Saturday siya and kinabukasan ng game 1 na ‘yon ay

cheerdance competition namin so we really can’t miss the training. I was just

hoping for the best.

Muntik ko nang mabato ang lunchbox ko nang mag-ring ang phone ko. I was in a

mini circle with the girls on the floor so I pushed myself back to keep

distance before answering the phone.

“Hey,” bungad ko, nakapagilid para hindi mapansin nila Ate Raya.

[Oh, wala kang training?] Sevi asked.

“Breaktime. We’re eating.. a little,” I consciously looked back at the girls

to see if they were watching. “Congratulations. Road to finals.”

[Salamat.] He laughed. [Hindi ka makakanood sa Saturday, ‘no? May training

kayo. Malapit na ‘yung CDC.]

“Yeah, but goodluck.”

“Hoy, Eli, sino ‘yang kausap mo, ah?”

My eyes widened and looked back at Ate Raya. Lahat sila nakatingin na sa’kin

at nang-aasar na ang ngiti. Agad kong pinatay ang tawag at bumalik sa circle,

acting like nothing happened.

“Hindi na siya baby, guys,” Ate Mae wiped her fake tears.

“Thomasian ba ‘yan, baby girl?” Ate Cess smirked. “Shet, ang yummy. Based on

experience lang ‘to but they’re so good in kissing!”

“H-huh?!” My eyes widened. “K-kiss?!”

“Kaya bago ka sumabak, dapat you know how to kiss!” She added. “Or else

mapapahiya ka talaga! Omg, flashbacks!”

My innocent mind was being corrupted! I just ignored their comments and

focused on my food. Kissing?! I wasn’t even thinking of that! Wala pa nga

akong first kiss so how would I know how to kiss?! My gosh.

After our training, diretso uwi na ‘ko sa amin at nakatulog kaagad pagkatapos

mag-shower dahil sa sobrang pagod. Hindi kami nagkita ni Sevi until Saturday

dahil busy kami pareho. He was busy preparing for the finals and I was busy

preparing for the cheerdance competition, but we still talk. Nagmemessage siya

sa'kin from time-to-time and nagrereply naman ako.

Around 4 PM, Saturday, nang dumating ako sa training at wala pa si coach kaya

sila Ate Raya, tutok na tutok sa laptop, watching the livestream of

basketball. Nilapag ko ang gamit ko sa gilid at umupo rin sa tabi nila to

watch.

I was so nervous during the game! Lamang kaagad ang Ateneo sa kanila.

"And Camero for the three points shot!" The commentator said.

"Oh my god, sobrang lamang pa rin ng Ateneo though," Ate Raya pointed at the

scores.

Umalis na 'ko sa pagkakaupo ko roon at kinuha na lang ang towel at ponytail ko

sa bag. I refused to watch. Today's game wasn't in favor of them so I didn't

want to watch. Ako lang 'yung kinakabahan para sa kanila.

Good thing coach called everyone na so they stopped watching the livestream

and just went back to training. We had a break during dinnertime kaya nilabas

ko ang phone ko at tinignan ang results ng game. I sighed and checked Sevi's

message.

From: Sevi

olats awit

I laughed before typing my reply.

To: Sevi

It’s okay. Game 1 pa lang.

From: Sevi

hintayin kita after ng training mo ah

I typed okay before we went back to training. Mas late na kami natapos dahil

nag-meeting pa. It was around 1 AM na nang lumabas ako at nakita ulit si Sevi

nakaupo sa malapit na hagdanan like last time. He was wearing a pair of black

shorts and then a yellow shirt. Mukhang bored na bored na siya.

“Hey,” I tapped his shoulder.

Napatingin kaagad siya sa’kin at tumayo. He looked so stressed out.

“I told you late kami matatapos. Dapat umuwi ka na. It’s already midnight,” I

showed him my watch.

“Gusto nga kitang makita,” he sighed.

I pursed my lips and offered him my hand so he could hold it because he looked

so lonely. He gave me a small smile and intertwined our hands together before

we walked towards McDo. Iyon na lang ang bukas na fastfood, e.

“Come on, don’t be sad. May game 2 pa naman, eh,” I cheered him up.

“Kapag natalo kami sa game 2, game over na,” seryosong sabi niya. “Last year

ko na bilang captain. Sayang naman.”

Oh, right. Graduating na siya. It must be hard for him to leave tapos ‘yung

last na laro niya pa ay talo. I bit my lower lip and sighed too.

“I know you will do well,” I stopped walking and smiled at him.

“Really,” he was not convinced.

I faced him and stared at him for a moment before letting his hand go.

Napatingin siya sa kamay ko pero agad ding napabalik sa’kin ang tingin nang

lumapit ako at niyakap siya sa bewang. I felt him stiffen for a while, not

knowing what to do.

“It’s okay,” I consoled him.

He put his hands around me and caressed my hair.

“It’s okay. I know you did your best and your best does not have to be

perfect,” I tapped his back.

“Tama na, kinikilig ako,” he laughed.

I could hear his heart beating so fast so I decided to let go already! Baka

magka-heart attack pa siya. When I looked at him, his ears were already red.

He couldn’t even look at me.

“Wow,” I said in disbelief. “You really like me, huh?”

“Oo nga,” he scratched his head a little, getting embarrassed.

Tumawa lang ako at naglakad na papuntang McDo. He said he ate already so he

just ordered a float. Ako naman, I ordered food for Kuya Roel. Humanap pa rin

kami ng upuan so we could talk.

“Have you already figured out what to wear tomorrow?” I raised a brow at him.

“Oo,” he laughed. “Bukas, makikita mo.”

We talked for a while bago niya ‘ko hinatid ulit sa parking. Hindi na ‘ko

nakapagchat sa kanya before matulog dahil sa sobrang pagod at nerbyos para

bukas. I just wanted to get through it!

I was up early to go to our last training before the performance. Pagkatapos

non, nagpalit na kami at nag-ayos na para maagang makarating sa arena. I

looked at my phone when Sevi sent me a message.

sevirous: goodluck! kaya mo ‘yan!

I laughed and typed my reply.

elydezma: Thanks. Don’t forget to wear green >:)

sevirous: checheer kita mamaya pero siyempre hindi mo maririnig. focus ka lang

sa routine niyo. kaya mo ‘yan :)

It eased my nervousness a bit, pero nang makarating na sa backstage ng arena,

mas kinabahan lang ako. Unti-unti nang napupuno ang crowd. Ate Raya and others

were playing a game while waiting para hindi sila kabahan masyado. Pang-apat

pa kasi kami sa magpeperform just right after Salinggawi.

I stepped outside of the room for a while to gather air. Sumandal ako sa pader

at pinaglaruan ang daliri ko, inaalala ang routine para mamaya. Mas nakakakaba

sa’kin dahil flyer ako.

“Goodluck!” Someone from Salinggawi said.

“Thank you,” I smiled back at her.

Pumasok na ulit ako sa room hanggang sa tinawag na kami para mag-perform sa

labas. I was holding Ate Raya’s hand like a kid. Ininterview muna kami bago

kami dumiretso sa labas. The crowd cheered for us, just like last year.

I inhaled a large amount of breath and focused on the performance. We started

when we heard the drums.

I was just hoping for a cleaner routine this time, kahit hindi na manalo. I

just wanted to do the routine well. It was really going well until it was

almost the end of the performance. They threw me in the air and then sinalo

nila ‘ko, and then they pushed my feet up so fast I failed my balance and fell

on the mat.

I heard the crowd’s ‘ooh’ because of that. My leg was so in pain and I wanted

to cry but I still went in the air for the next stunt. Tiniis ko na lang ang

sakit sa binti ko. Hindi pa nga masyadong magaling ang pasa last time, mukhang

magkakaroon nanaman.

The crowd clapped for us even though we probably did bad. I did bad. I was so

quiet when we went back to the backstage. Our coach immediately went to me to

check my leg. I bit my lower lip and held tightly on his shoulder when he

stretched it and pushed my feet towards my direction to ease the pain.

“It’s okay, Eli. Don’t feel bad about it,” Ate Raya tried to comfort me.

I stayed quiet. After wrapping a bandage around it, pinahinga ko ang binti ko

at kinuha na lang ang phone ko. My mom sent me a message.

From: Mommy

Baby are you okay? I was watching the livestream in the office.

To: Mommy

I’m fine

They couldn’t make it because of a very important meeting and si Kuya naman

may aattendan daw na talk. Okay lang, though, because they went last year.

Ngayon lang talaga hectic ang schedule.

sevirous: you did good! congrats!

Napairap kaagad ako sa message niya.

elydezma: Stop lying. I did bad. I literally fell.

sevirous: oo nga pero okay naman, ah? ang galing niyo nga, e!

sevirous: cheer up! cheerleader ka pa naman tapos hindi mo chinecheer sarili

mo hahahaha

Napanguso ako para pigilan ang tawa ko at hindi na siya nireplyan. Masaya

naman sila Ate Raya dahil tapos na and wala naman na kaming magagawa para

ibalik ‘yon so they just started placing their bets on who will win this time.

Lumabas ulit kami para sa awarding. Umupo lang kami sa mat and waited for them

to announce the winners. I looked around and tried to find Sevi but there were

too many people so I just gave up.

They announced the winners like what I predicted. NU, UST, FEU. Tumayo na kami

nang matapos ang ceremony at puro interview na lang. My squad was busy

congratulating the teams so I sneaked out and looked around again.

“Hey,” someone tapped my shoulder.

Napalingon kaagad ako at nakita si Sevi. He was wearing a green La Salle shirt

underneath his black jacket with a tiger logo on it. I looked at him with a

sad face kaya nawala ang ngiti niya.

“Okay lang ba binti mo?” Nag-aalalang tanong niya sa’kin.

I nodded and bit my lower lip to stop my tears from falling. I really hate it

when people ask me if I’m okay because most of the time, I will burst into

tears.

“Hey,” he reached for me and wrapped his arms around me for a hug.

Binaon ko ang mukha ko sa dibdib niya at umiyak. He tightened his hug on me

and caressed my hair to calm me down.

“Hey, it’s okay,” malambing na sabi niya. “Okay lang ‘yun. Wala namang

perpektong routine. May mga nahulog din naman kanina. Maganda naman ‘yung sa

inyo, e. May next year pa.”

I was still crying on his chest. May tumawag sa kanya kaya naramdaman kong

lumingon siya sa ibang direksyon.

“Uy, congrats,” rinig kong sabi niya sa tumawag sa kanya habang yakap pa rin

ako. “Oo, eh. Ingat kayo,” he laughed slightly and probably waved his other

hand bago binalik sa’kin.

I tried to wipe my tears with my hands. Binitawan niya ko at nilabas ang panyo

niya para siya na ang magpunas ng luha ko. He was smiling at me while holding

my chin with his other hand.

“Tahan na,” he said softly.

I pursed my lips and looked away, trying to stop the tears. I just felt so

embarrassed. Pakiramdam ko pinatalo ko ‘yung team and sinira ko ‘yung routine.

“Sev, picture tayo!” May lumapit na magandang cheerleader from NU.

Pinunasan ko kaagad ang luha ko at tumingin sa babae. She did not even notice

me. I gave Sevi a nod so he could take a picture with the woman. Mukhang

magkaibigan sila, e.

“Congrats, Bianca,” he said, smiling.

“Last year na natin ‘to. Sa site na tayo magkikita next time, ‘no?” The girl

laughed.

“Naks naman, Engineer,” pang-aasar ni Sevi. “Sana nga. Huwag mong batiin! Baka

hindi ko maging last. Mahirap na!”

“Kaya mo ‘yan, ikaw pa!” The girl playfully hit him on his chest. “Sige na, my

team is calling me! Hang out again soon!”

Kumaway si Sevi sa babae bago naglakad pabalik sa’kin. I was already glaring

at him, forgetting about the tears I shed earlier.

“Ano?” Natakot kaagad siya sa tingin ko.

“You have a cheerleader friend from NU?” I asked about it.

Hindi siya sumagot agad. Tinanggal niya ang itim niyang UST jacket at nilagay

sa balikat ko para suotin ko dahil niyayakap ko ang sarili ko. Our costume was

thin and fitted and my skin was a bit exposed so I felt cold.

“Oo, si Bianca. Engineering din,” he answered casually.

“You probably like her better than me now?” I raised a brow. “Because they

won. They did great.”

“Ano?” Nagulat siya sa sinabi ko at tumawa.

“Ewan ko sa’yo,” I rolled my eyes.

“Ikaw lang gusto ko,” he smiled.

Napanguso tuloy ako para pigilan ang ngiti ko. Nawala kaagad ang masamang

pakiramdam dahil sa nangyari kanina. My mood suddenly changed because of him.

“Hay, sana all,” napalingon ako kay Ate Raya na dumaan.

“Ate!” Gulat na sabi ko at agad lumayo kay Sevi.

“Tawag tayo ni coach, Eli,” she laughed and looked at Sevi. “Hi Captain.

Pahiram lang ng cheerleader namin, ah. Nice shirt, by the way.”

Napatingin ako sa shirt ni Sevi na may ‘Animo La Salle’. Tumawa kaagad si Sevi

at tinakpan ‘yon kunwari.

“I’ll just.. message you,” sabi ko kay Sevi bago umalis.

“Dalawang jacket na ‘yung nasa’yo, ah,” he reminded me.

I spent time with the team before ako sinundo ni Kuya Roel para umuwi na. When

I got home, Mommy was already preparing food for me. Hindi ko nga alam na

nakauwi na siya from the meeting! She was still wearing her corporate attire

when I went to the dining.

“What are these for, Mommy?” I asked, putting my bag down.

“To celebrate!” She smiled at me.

“But we didn’t win,” I pursed my lips.

“And so?” She raised a brow. “We’re celebrating it because you did your best.

Now, let’s eat, my Amore.”

“Tita’s right! You did your best!” Lumabas si Ida sa kusina, hawak hawak ang

bowl ng soup. “It will pass!”

I wanted to cry! I really really appreciated the people who were with me.

Kaunti lang ang friends ko and the people I was in good terms with but at

least they were true to me.

“Eli,” my mom called, staring at my jacket.

Hinubad ko kaagad ‘yon, panicking. Tinabi ko ‘yon sa may upuan at tinabunan ng

dala kong duffel bag.

“Why are you panicking? It’s okay,” my mom chuckled.

“I borrowed it from a friend!” Depensa ko kaagad.

Ida bit her lower lip to stop herself from talking. Sinamaan ko siya ng tingin

para bigyan ng warning.

“You’re so good at lying, Eli, but you can’t lie to your mom,” my mom shook

her head. “Sit down. Invite your.. friend.”

“M-mommy!” Hindi pa rin ako umupo dahil sa gulat. “I don’t want to invite my

friend!”

“I said invite your friend. I want to meet him,” my mom said in a stern voice.

“It’s.. It’s a woman!” Tanggi ko kaagad.

Bumuntong-hininga si Mommy at umakyat saglit sa kwarto para may kuhanin.

Pagkabalik niya sa dining, dala-dala na niya ang denim jacket ni Sevi. My eyes

widened and tried to get it from her.

“It says men here,” my mom pointed at the size inside the jacket.

“Come on, Mom. Women can also wear men clothes and vice versa,” I still tried

to deny.

“Okay, Eli, but can women play on UAAP men’s basketball?” She asked back.

Napaawang ang labi ko at tumingin ulit kay Ida pero umiwas siya ng tingin at

umaktong busy naglalagay ng sabaw sa bowl. I glared at her. She probably told

my mom something!

“Don’t look at Ida. I just asked her why you were so interested in watching

basketball. Hindi ka naman nanonood dati,” my mom shrugged.

“Okay, fine!” I gave up and got my phone out of my pocket. “If daddy sees

this, I will go nuts!”

“Your dad is out on a business trip, Eli. It’s fine,” my mom laughed.

Sumimangot ako at tinalikuran sila para i-chat si Sevi.

elydezma: My mom wants you here. Now.

sevirous: HA ANO TEKA

elydezma: I’ll ask Kuya Roel to pick you up wherever you are. My mom wants to

meet you.

sevirous: wait lang galit ba siya? hindi pa nga tayo e!

elydezma: Just go.

Umakyat na muna ako sa kwarto ko para maligo at magpalit ng damit. I wore a

simple maong shorts and white shirt. Sa bahay lang ako but I sprayed perfume

because Sevi’s coming. I also applied some lip and cheek tint.

I called Kuya Roel to pick Sevi up at UST hospital. Pagkababa ko, sabi ni

Mommy, huwag daw muna kumain dahil hihintayin pa si Sevi kaya naglaro na lang

muna kami ni Ida ng PlayStation.

“Umamin ka na ba sa kanya?” Tanong ni Ida, nakangiti.

“No!” Tanggi ko kaagad. “Why would I?!”

“Uhm, duh?!” She rolled her eyes. “If you like someone and that someone likes

you back, then you should be together!”

“Not necessarily,” I licked my lower lip a little. “I’m scared, okay? You know

I never had a boyfriend before.”

“And now’s the time!” Ida was so happy. “I can see Sevi’s impact on you, okay?

And I can tell that he’s a good influence. Hindi mo ba napapansin? You’re not

that grumpy anymore.”

Yeah, I know his effect on me pero natatakot talaga ako magkaboyfriend! Like,

what if I can’t really commit? What if I can’t handle the relationship? What

if hindi kami magkatuluyan? What if magsawa siya sa’kin bigla because of my

attitude? All of it will end up in a heartbreak!

Paano kapag sa umpisa lang pala siya masaya?

“Okay, if you’re not ready yet, it’s fine. Ask him to court you!” Advice ulit

ni Ida.

“Court me?” Kumunot ang noo ko. “People still court?”

“Uhm, duh?!”

I should ask him? What? Ako ba dapat ang nagtatanong? I didn’t know! I had no

idea!

Napatayo kaagad ako sa sahig nang marinig ang doorbell sa baba. Dali-dali

akong tumakbo pababa ng hagdan kaso naalala ang binti ko so I slowed down. My

mom opened the door and smiled at Sevi.

I fake coughed and composed myself before greeting him.

“Good.. Uh.. Good morning- Noon- Ay, afternoon po. Afternoon pa ba?” He looked

at his watch nervously.

“Come in, come in,” my mom opened the door widely.

I bit my lower lip when Sevi entered our house. He was wearing a pair of black

jeans, white button-down polo na short-sleeved. The first three buttons of his

polo were opened, revealing his chest a bit. He also fixed his hair. He

looked.. clean.

“Hi,” bati ko nang lumapit sa kanya.

“My god, her voice changed!” Sabi ni Mommy kay Ida.

“It did not!” Inis na sabi ko.

Tumawa si Sevi at binulsa ang mga kamay niya sa pants habang nililibot ang

paningin sa malaking bahay. Napatigil lang siya sa pag-admire sa paintings

nang tawagin na siya ni Mommy sa dining. He panicked and walked so fast.

Umupo ako sa tabi ni Sevi at sa harapan ko si Ida. Si Mommy ang nakaupo sa

center ng long table. Sevi was just staring at his plate, mukhang natatakot

gumalaw.

“What do you want?” I whispered on him.

“Busog pa ‘ko,” bulong niya rin.

“You don’t want to eat my food?” My mom scared him!

“Actually, gutom nga po ako. Nagutom ako sa byahe,” Sevi changed his mind and

tried to get rice.

I giggled and poured water on his glass. Parang tanga si Ida sa harapan ko na

nakangiti at mukhang kinikilig. Sinipa ko tuloy siya sa ilalim ng table kaya

napasigaw siya sa sakit.

“You’re from?” My mom started to ask Sevi questions. “UST?”

“Opo. Civil engineering. 5th year,” sunod-sunod na sagot ni Sevi.

“And a basketball player?”

“Opo. Captain ng UST,” tumango ulit si Sevi.

“Captain, huh..” My mom nodded slowly. “So what are your plans after

graduation?”

“Review po sa boards and then take. Kung kaya, isang take lang, and then

magtatrabaho na po sa Valeria Group hanggang sa maging professional. Ayun po,”

Sevi looked passionate but nervous.

“Valeria Group Construction?” My mom asked. “They already contacted you?”

“Uh.. Opo.. ‘Yung may-ari po kasi..” Sevi glanced at me nervously. “Wala. I’m

kind of.. close with the owners.”

“Wow,” my mom gasped. “That’s a big company, ah.”

Tumango si Sevi at sinubukang ipagpatuloy ang pag-kain. Hindi na rin nagtanong

si Mommy kaya naman nakakain kami nang maayos. Ako rin kasi, kinakabahan para

sa kanya.

“I’ll just take a call,” tumayo si Mommy at kinuha ang phone niya.

Nang umakyat si Mommy sa study room, nakahinga nang maluwag si Sevi. Ida

almost choked on her water because she laughed so hard.

“Are you done eating? You want to walk outside to get some fresh air?” I asked

him.

“What? Iiwan niyo ‘ko?!” Ida pouted.

“You want to come?” I raised a brow.

“Ay, hindi na! No need! I can stay here with my food!” Ida smiled. “Enjoy!”

Tumayo si Sevi at sumunod sa’kin papunta sa likod dahil nandoon ang malaking

garden at ang pool. Umupo ako sa porch swing at tumabi naman siya sa’kin.

“I’m sorry. It was so sudden,” I apologized. “Ang kulit kasi ni Mommy.”

“Okay lang. Ang gusto ko lang malaman ay kung pasado ba ‘ko?” He chuckled.

“Hindi naman siya mukhang galit. Mukhang okay naman, diba?”

“I don’t know!” I rolled my eyes. “I told her we’re just friends.”

“Friends?” He asked, confused. “Kailan tayo naging friends?”

‘Ask him to court you’ I heard Ida’s voice inside my head.

“Well, I don’t know what to say! You’re not even doing anything!” Reklamo ko

sa kanya.

“Ano?” Kumunot ang noo niya at tumingin sa’kin. “Ano bang gusto mong gawin

ko?”

“I’m asking you to court me!”

His eyes widened for a bit before his expression changed into an amused look.

He scoffed and smiled like I said something funny. Ngumuso ako at umiwas ng

tingin dahil sa hiya.

Ganoon ba dapat ‘yun?! Why did it sound so demanding?!

Ugh, I hate Ida!

“YOU are asking ME to court you?” He asked, emphasizing the pronouns.

“Yes! You should!” Pinanindigan ko na lang.

“I should?” Ulit niya nanaman, mukhang natutuwa.

I glared at him because he kept on repeating everything! Bakit ba hindi na

lang niya sagutin! Nakakahiya ‘yung ganito.

I shouldn’t have said that. Bakit ba ‘ko nagpapauto?

“You said you like me,” I sighed and looked at my hands.

“Oo nga,” tumango siya. “Gusto kita.”

“Ida said.. You should.. court me,” I said nervously.

He stared at me for a moment before letting out a short laugh. Inis akong

tumayo para umalis na sa porch swing pero hinawakan niya ang kamay ko at

hinatak ako pabalik. Napaupo ako sa binti niya!

“Oh my god, sorry,” tumayo ako kaagad at lumipat ng upo sa tabi niya.

“Sige,” he chuckled.

“Anong sige?” Naguguluhang tanong ko.

He leaned closer so I looked away, hindi kinakaya ang lapit ng mukha niya

sa’kin. I could feel his breath on my heated face.

“Pwede bang manligaw?” Seryosong tanong niya.

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:)

11

“Is that the nearest seat?”

I pointed at the tickets Ida got for me para sa game 2 ng basketball finals.

It was Tuesday and I got nothing to do after class since wala na kaming

training. I asked Ida to get us tickets for game 2 pero wala akong balak

sabihin kay Sevi. I told him may class ako.

“It’s the best seat! Malapit ‘yan! Pinaghirapan ko pa ‘yan makuha,” binigay ni

Ida ang ticket sa’kin.

Dala-dala ko na ang dalawang jackets at tsaka ‘yung tiger shirt ni Sevi na

nakalimutan ko na namang ibalik last time. I was planning to go to UST today

since wala naman na ‘kong gagawin at para na rin masauli ko ‘tong jackets niya

before the game.

“Paano ‘yan! Wala kang tiger shirt,” Ida was worried about that.

“I’ll do something. Don’t worry,” kinuha ko ang mga gamit ko para maglakad na

palabas ng building.

“Good luck sa landi mo!” Sigaw ni Ida.

Tumawa ako bago kumaway ulit sa kanya palabas. Pagkasakay ko sa kotse, sinabi

ko kaagad kay Kuya Roel na pupunta akong hospital.

“Hospital po ulit, Ma’am?” Kuya Roel asked.

“Yes, Kuya. Magpapakuha lang ako ng dugo. Required sa.. school,” pagpapalusot

ko.

Hindi na rin nagsalita si Kuya Roel after noon pero nakita kong napangiti siya

sa sinabi ko. I was so good in lying! Panigurado hindi niya nahalatang

nagsisinungaling ako!

To: Sevi

Hey I’m omw na sa ust

From: Sevi

text ka na lang kapag nandito ka na may training pa kami baka hindi ako

makapagreply kaagad hehe ingat :)

Around 4:00 PM na nang makarating ako sa UST. Kuya Roel did not even leave the

car. Hindi na siya nag-insist samahan ako sa loob ng hospital which was weird

kaya pagkababa ko ng carpark, hindi ko na kinailangan magtago. I went straight

to the yellow building last time. Umupo ulit ako sa hagdan at nag-phone.

To: Sevi

Here na ‘ko sa stairs. Take your time pero bilisan mo.

“Hoy.”

“What the fuck!” Hinampas ko kaagad si Sevi nang mapatayo ako sa gulat.

He laughed at my reaction. Masama ko siyang tinignan at tinulak nang mahina

dahil sa inis. That was the time when I noticed that he only brought himself.

Walang bag. He was wearing a black sleeveless shirt and black atheltic shorts.

Pula naman ang sneakers.

“Are you done?” I asked.

“Hindi. Lumabas lang ako saglit. Tara, pasok ka,” he put his hand on my

shoulder to pull me down the stairs.

“I don’t have an I.D.!” Sabi ko sa kanya.

“Okay lang ‘yan. Hindi ‘yan mapapansin ng guard. Tropa ko ‘yon,” tumawa siya

at bumaba ang hawak mula sa balikat ko papunta sa kamay ko.

The guard just gave him a smile when we walked inside. I didn’t have time to

look around because he already pulled me inside the open door. Pagkapasok,

bumungad ang basketball court nila. The players were on a break time at

pinaglalaruan ‘yung bola. Napatingin kaagad sila sa’kin pagkapasok ko.

“Yieeeee,” pang-aasar kaagad nila.

Binawi ko ang kamay ko at awkward na umiwas ng tingin.

“Sana all!” A player laughed and playfully threw the ball at Sevi. Sinalo niya

naman at binato pabalik.

“Bawal girlfriend, ah!” Tumatawang sabi nung isa.

“Bitter ka lang, pre,” tinapik siya sa balikat nung isa.

“Upo ka muna roon. Malapit na kami matapos,” turo ni Sevi sa bleachers.

Tumango ako at umakyat sa may bleachers para umupo roon. Tinawag na sila ng

coach nila kaya bumalik na sila sa court. I didn’t know what to do. Nanood

lang ako kung paano sila maglaro. Nagbibiruan pa minsan na parang mga bata.

Binato nung isa ‘yung bola kay Sevi at nasalo niya naman kaya shinoot. It went

in.

“Tatlo para I love you,” tumawa ‘yung isang player at binato ulit kay Sevi

‘yung bola.

“Corny mo, ugok,” umiling si Sevi pero sinalo pa rin naman ang bola.

The ball went inside the net again. Kinuha niya nanaman at shinoot. Nang

pumasok ulit, tumingin siya sa’kin and then he playfully gave me a finger

heart. I laughed at him and rolled my eyes.

“Hoy, bawal ‘yan!” Binaba ng isa nilang player ‘yung kamay ni Sevi. “Ako lang

mahal mo, sabi mo!”

They were so playful pero sumeryoso rin naman nang sawayin na ng coach. Nang

matapos, lumapit na si Sevi sa duffel bag niya at nagpunas ng pawis gamit ang

towel. My eyes widened when he suddenly took off his shirt.

Some players did the same para magpalit ng damit. Kinuha ni Sevi ang white

shirt niya sa bag pero napahinto nang makitang nakatingin ako. He playfully

covered his perfectly fit body and laughed.

Oh my god, he had abs.

Ngayon lang ako nakakita noon. Last time sa debut ko, madilim kaya hindi ko

gaanong nakita, and I had no interest then! Ngayon, nag-iinit ang mukha ko.

“Tara na,” Sevi was already leaning on the railings.

Tumayo ako at kinuha ang gamit ko bago bumaba. Nang makalabas kami sa building

na ‘yon, huminto kami saglit sa may hagdanan para tanungin niya ‘ko kung saan

ko gustong kumain.

“I want pizza,” I was craving because of my period.

“Pizza,” ulit niya at tumango. “Sige, pizza. Maraming pizza rito. Shakey’s?

Yellow Cab? Sbarro? Domino’s? Alin gusto mo?”

“I don’t know,” sagot ko. Basta pizza! Hindi ko alam kung alin doon.

“Domino’s! Buy 1 take 1 ngayon! Tuesday, e!” Tinignan niya ang phone niya.

Tumango na lang ako at inakbayan niya ‘ko para hindi ako mapunta sa kung saan-

saan. Lumabas kami sa Gate 2 and then we took the overpass papunta sa kabilang

side ng road. Napatigil pa kami sa overpass because two girls approached him

for a photo.

I took a step to the side and crossed my arms. They had solo pictures and then

they suddenly wanted to have a picture together as a group.

“Hi, Ate, picture-an mo nga po kami,” the girl handed me her phone without

even asking if it was okay.

Kumunot ang noo ko sa kanya at tinaasan siya ng kilay. She could have asked

nicely!

“You can’t do selfies?” I asked.

Napakamot si Sevi sa ulo niya dahil sa sagot ko at bahagyang nahiya roon sa

dalawang babae. Sumimangot ang babae at nagkatinginan sila ng kasama niya,

obviously talking shit about me but I didn’t care.

“Okay na nga ‘yan, be!” Sabi nung babae. “Thank you po, Kuya!”

“Thank you!” Kumaway din si Sevi at ngumiti sa kanila hanggang sa makaalis na

ang dalawang babae.

He reached for me and placed his hand again on my shoulder before walking. I

still had my arms crossed over my chest until we entered Domino’s pizza. Umupo

ako roon at tinignan ang menu. Umupo naman siya sa harapan ko.

“Oy, bakit ang sungit mo?” He asked carefully, scared that I might lash out.

“What do you mean? This is me on a daily basis,” I rolled my eyes.

Â Nothing changed. I was still a bitch. Hindi pa ba siya sanay?

“Pero nakakahiya roon sa dalawang babae kanina,” he tried to lecture me on it.

“Next time, plastikin mo na lang o ano.”

“So I should fake it?” I asked again just to be clear.

“Ewan,” he scratched his head a little. “Ikaw bahala. Huwag mo lang silang

takutin nang ganoon. Nakakatakot ka, e.”

“I just asked if hindi sila marunong mag selfie,” I defended myself. “And they

did not even ask me if it was okay for me. They just straight up handed me the

phone!”

“Huwag na nga. Ayoko ng away,” he sighed and held my hand on top of the table.

“Change topic. Kumusta araw mo?”

I pouted and told myself that I should be nice next time, or at least pretend

to be nice dahil ‘yun ang gusto niya. Fine! Fine! I mean.. They really could

have.. just.. asked nicely? Whatever! It was my fault!

Hindi ako nakasagot kaagad dahil nag-order pa kami. Nang makabalik sa table,

kinuha ko ang paper bag at inabot na sa kanya. I slid it over the table until

it reached him. Kinuha niya naman at tinignan ang laman.

“I need a tiger shirt,” I told him.

“Huh? Para saan? Akala ko hindi ka makakanood?” Nagtatakang tanong niya

pagkatapos itabi ang paper bag sa gilid.

“Not sure yet. I might cut my class, unless may quiz,” I shrugged casually

like I was not lying. “Do you have? Ayoko na nyang binigay mo last time.”

“Wala akong dala,” kinuha niya ang bag niya at naghalungkat doon. “Old jersey

ko lang.”

“That would do,” nilahad ko ang kamay ko sa kanya.

Kinuha niya ang yellow jersey doon at inamoy niya pa muna bago binigay sa’kin.

He laughed when I also sniffed on it like what he did. Mabango naman, ah. It

smelled like him.

“May ticket ka ba? Mayroon ako rito.” He reached for his wallet.

“It’s fine. If pupunta ako, I’ll find a way,” pagpigil ko sa kanya.

I wanted to surprise him, okay?! Kaya hindi ko masabi. Game 2 was so important

for him dahil doon na malalaman kung may chance pa silang makahabol sa game 3.

He was so nervous about it because it was already his last year as a player

and as a captain. I wanted to be there to support him.

“Punta ka na,” he said softly and squeezed my hand. “Please?”

“Hindi ko nga alam! I have class!” I lied.

“Sasabihin ko sanang mag-cut ka pero hindi ako masamang tao kaya sige,” he

sighed and nodded. “Study first. Study first.”

Nang ilapag na ‘yung pizza sa harap namin, nilagyan niya na ‘ko ng slice sa

plato ko bago siya. I reached for the hot sauce and put some all over my

pizza. Hindi ko susundin ang diet ko this time.

“Do you think you’ll win tomorrow?” I asked curiously.

“No,” he chuckled. “Lakas ng Ateneo, e.”

“Engk!” I shook my head. “Wrong answer!”

“E, ano?” He raised a brow and took a bite on his pizza.

“I hope so,” I corrected. “That should be your answer. I don’t care if malakas

‘yung Ateneo. If you won’t believe in yourself, then how would you win?!”

“Galit ka ba?” He laughed. “Bakit parang galit ka?”

“Yes, I’m mad because you don’t trust yourself!” I rolled my eyes. “I trust you so trust yourself din!”

“You trust me?” His lips slowly formed a smile after realizing what I just said.

“Of course I trust you!” Binalik ko ang pizza sa plato ko at tinignan siya nang masama. “Kung hindi kita pinagkakatiwalaan, e’di sana hindi kita pinayagang manligaw!”

“Ay, wow,” he dramatically held his chest. “Ganda mo talaga.”

“Well, small thing,” I shrugged.

I laughed when he laughed! His laugh was so contagious. We probably looked

dumb laughing at each other. I almost choked on my pizza because of it!

Pagkatapos namin kumain, hinatid na niya ‘ko ulit papunta sa carpark. Huminto

kami sa tapat ng entrance at humarap ako sa kanya to bid goodbye.

“I’ll.. go now. Goodluck tomorrow,” I bit my lower lip.

“Ingat ka,” he ruffled my hair and laughed when I hit him.

Tumalikod na ‘ko at umakyat sa carpark. Nakita ko si Kuya Roel na nakasandal

sa may kotse at nagcecellphone. He opened the door for me when he saw me

approaching.

The next day, I attended my classes but went home early with Ida dahil wala

nga ang prof namin sa last two subjects. Ida helped me roll the banner I made

for Sevi. I mean, I made an effort this time dahil baka last na niyang game

‘to. I wanted to cheer him up.

“You think it’s too cheesy?” I asked Ida.

Kinuha ulit ni Ida ang banner at binuksan para tignan ang nakalagay.

‘LET’S GO CAPTAIN! #CameROAR #GoUSTe’

“Okay naman siya. Short but powerful sa CameRoar,” Ida laughed. “Halatang siya

lang ang sinusuportahan mo, girl.”

“Okay na ‘yan!” I rolled it up again.

I was wearing a yellow bandana on my forehead. Suot ko rin ang yellow jersey

ni Sevi with his surname and jersey number at the back. Nakatuck-in sa maong

shorts ko dahil medyo malaki sa'kin. I added a black Chanel belt so it

wouldn't look plain.

I also wore a black tube inside because sleeveless ang jersey at malaki siya

so nakikita ang sides ng chest ko. Ida was also wearing a tiger shirt

partnered with a pair of mom jeans. We looked so ready for the game.

"Oh, another game?" My mom caught us leaving.

"Mommy!" Gulat na sabi ko.

"UST again, huh?" She looked at our shirts. "Anyway, sending my goodluck to

Sevi. Let's go, Tigers!" She cheered with her fist in the air.

"Mommy, don't do that again, please," I was so embarrassed.

"What? I'm gonna watch the livestream. Tell him to do well or else isusumbong

ko siya sa Daddy mo," my mom laughed.

"Mommy!" Inis na sabi ko at humalik na sa pisngi niya para makaalis na. "Don't

tell Daddy."

"It depends sa performance ni Sevi sa game," pang-aasar niya pa rin.

Sumimangot ako at hinatak na si Ida palabas ng bahay. Kuya Roel dropped us off

in front of the arena. Pumapasok na ‘yung mga tao kaya pumunta na rin kami sa

entrance ng hawak naming tickets. Ida got us balloons again! Someone was

giving it out for free.

“Whoa, we’re near,” sabi ko pagkaupo.

“Of course! Thanks to me!” Ida smirked and sat down beside me, holding the

balloon.

Kinakabahan ako kahit wala pa naman. Hindi ko nirereplyan si Sevi simula pa

kanina para mas masurprise siyang narito ako. Ang lapit pa namin sa bench ng

UST kaya napansin ko kaagad na nandito na sila.

I smiled when I saw Sevi staring at his phone, waiting for something. He

sighed and shook his head before putting his phone back inside his bag.

Kinuha ko ang phone ko at nakitang nag-text siya sa’kin ngayon lang.

From: Sevi

hindi ka talaga manonood? :(

I laughed and typed my reply.

To: Sevi

I have class.

He was talking to their coach kaya hindi niya kaagad nakita ang reply ko. I

waited for him to be back on the bench so he could see my reply. Kinuha niya

nga ang phone niya at mas sumeryoso lang ang mukha nang mabasa ang text ko.

“Naaawa na ‘ko sa kanya, Eli. Umamin ka na,” siniko ako ni Ida.

From: Sevi

okay. kahit good luck lang ngayon? wala ba?

To: Sevi

GL.

I giggled again when I saw how his facial expression changed. Kumunot ang noo

niya at halatang nabadtrip sa nabasa niya sa phone. Huminga siya nang malalim

at nag-type ulit.

From: Sevi

tipid na tipid? hindi man lang binuo? malay ko ba kung Go Lasalle ibig sabihin

nyang GL mo.

He looked so mad! Tumawa ako at nag-type na. I couldn’t contain it anymore.

Malapit nang magsimula ang game so kailangan ko na siyang i-goodluck.

Bumaba ako sa steps at pumunta sa side niya. Nakatalikod siya sa bleachers at

kausap ang teammate niya kaya hindi niya napansing nasa likuran na niya ‘ko. I

leaned over the railings and tried to get his attention.

He was wearing their white jersey this time and still, black knee support. He

looked more fresh-looking in white.

“Pst, Sebastian!” I called him.

Napalingon siya sa’kin, nakakunot ang noo dahil narinig ang first name. I saw

how his face changed from being irritated to being shocked. His lips parted

for a bit as he stared at me.

“Scam!” He pointed at me.

Sinenyasan ko siyang lumapit sa’kin kaya iniwan niya kaagad ang kausap niya

para maglakad papunta sa side ko. I laughed when he stopped in front of me,

glaring.

“What?” I raised a brow.

“Sabi mo may klase ka!” Hindi pa rin siya makapaniwala. “Bakit ka nandito?”

“Ayaw mo ba? I can go home na.”

I was about to leave when he caught my hand and pulled me back to him. I

consciously looked around because I felt the stares of some people. Tama nga

ako at nanonood ang iba sa’min, lalo na ang kababaihan.

“Gusto,” his lips slowly formed a smile. “Kita.”

My eyes widened and lightly hit him on his chest for making my face heat. He

changed his grip on my hand so he could intertwine it with his.

“Sabi ni Mommy galingan mo raw or else isusumbong ka niya kay Daddy,” I

sounded like a kid.

“Weh?!” Gulat na sabi niya, natakot kaagad.

“Yes! So you should do well!” I threatened.

“Patay tayo dyan, oy,” he laughed. “Putulan mo ng cable o internet para hindi

makanood!”

Napalingon kami sa teammate niya nang tawagin na siya. Lumingon ulit siya

sa’kin at mas hinatak ako palapit para magpaalam na. I bit my lower lip and

consciously looked around again.

“Tinatawag na ‘ko,” sabi niya sa’kin.

Tumango ako. “Sige na. Uhm..”

“Uhm?” He raised his brows, mocking me.

“Goodluck,” I tiptoed and gave him a kiss on his cheek.

He stiffened and looked at me with wide eyes. Binitawan ko kaagad siya at

dali-daling bumalik sa upuan ko, embarrassed by what I did. I refused to look

around! Nararamdaman kong nakatingin sa’kin ang ibang tao.

“Oh my god, girl!” Hinampas ako ni Ida. “Did you just.. kiss him?! Oh my god,

teka, hindi ko in-expect! Tita! Tita, ‘yung anak niyo po malandi na!”

“Shut up, Ida.”

Pakiramdam ko namumula na ‘yung pisngi ko. It was an impulsive act! I did not

even plan that! I was caught in the moment! Pwede ko bang ipalusot kay Sevi

‘yon? Hindi ko sinasadya?

Sevi got distracted for a bit because of it! Nakita kong napatulala pa siya

saglit bago siya hinatak ng teammate niya papunta sa small circle nila. Mabuti

na lang ay bumalik na siya sa katinuan, but his ears were still red!

“Kapag ang UST natalo dahil dinistract mo si Captain, nako!” Sinisi pa ‘ko ni

Ida.

“He’ll be fine,” I said nervously.

When the game started, I got more nervous for the team. Ang dami kaagad points

ng Ateneo. Parang wala na silang balak hayaan ang UST maka-score sa first

quarter.

“Defensa! Defensa!” I cheered with the crowd.

Naagaw ng UST ang bola at sinubukan i-shoot pero hindi pumasok. Sevi jumped

for a rebound and it finally entered the net! Everyone stood up to cheer.

Nilabas ko na rin ang banner ko at tumalon-talon.

“Go Sevi!” I yelled.

He probably couldn’t hear me because he was so focused in the game but I

didn’t care. I just wanted to cheer for him for the last time kung hindi sila

mananalo sa game na ‘to. Nag-timeout ang UST kaya lumapit sila sa coach nila.

Sevi glanced at me for a second and gave me a thumbs down with a sad face. I

glared at him and showed him my banner instead. He looked at it and smiled,

natatawa pa nang kaunti.

“You can do it!” I yelled.

He chuckled before going back to the game. Lamang na lamang ang Ateneo sa

first quarter. Nagpahinga si Sevi sa second quarter at ganoon pa rin ang

nangyari. He went back during the third quarter. Doon na uminit ang laban

dahil humahabol na sila. The people were already standing to cheer.

“Go USTe! Go USTe! Go USTe! Go go go go!” I also cheered with the hand move.

The crowd went wild when UST scored again. Nalamangan na nila ang Ateneo

because of that three-point shot. Mas naging intense tuloy ang atmosphere

specially between the Ateneo crowd and UST crowd.

During the fourth quarter, nakahabol ulit ang Ateneo at lumamang nanaman. I

looked at the time. Kaunting segundo na lang ang natitira pero kaya pa naman

siyang habulin.

“Let’s go, Camero!!!!” I yelled again when Sevi was given a free throw.

He bounced the ball twice before taking his shot. The crowd went wild when it

went in. Â May dalawa pa siya at na-shoot pareho kaya nagsigawan na ang mga

tao.

“3..2..” I whispered, watching the remaining seconds.

Everyone stood up and cheered after the buzzer. Napatalon-talon ako nang

makitang lamang ang UST nang dalawang points! I hugged Ida out of excitement.

Dali-dali akong bumaba sa steps at lumapit sa may railings.

Sevi went straight to me and was about to give me a hug but he realized that he was full of sweat. He laughed and wiped his sweat with his black towel.

“Congratulations! I told you!” I smiled at him, still holding my banner.

“Guys, picture, dali!” Sumunod pala si Ida sa’kin.

Gusto kong tumanggi pero hinatak ako ni Sevi para magpapicture. Ngumiti na

lang ako sa camera at pinakita ang banner na dala ko. After that, humarap na

‘ko ulit kay Sevi at pinisil ang pisngi niya sa sobrang tuwa.

“You did great!” Gigil na sabi ko.

“Alam mo kung bakit?” He raised a brow.

“Pwet ko may rocket or what?” Inunahan ko na siya.

“Hindi,” he laughed. “Kasi.. natakot ako sa Mommy mo!”

I laughed at his face. Tinulak ko na rin siya kaagad dahil tinatawag na siya ng coach nila. I went home with Ida after that. Pagkapasok ko, nagulat ako dahil nagpeprepare nanaman si Mommy ng food!

“What are these for?” I asked her.

“Celebration?” She smirked.

“Celebrate what?” Nagtatakang tanong ko at lumingon kay Ida. “Is it your birthday? Hindi naman, diba?”

“No!” Agad na tanggi niya.

“They won! I watched it!” My mom looked excited. “Tell Sevi to come over.

We’re going to celebrate his win.”

Bukas pa dapat kami magkikita ulit ni Sevi but since my mom insisted, nilabas

ko ang phone ko at chinat ulit siyang pumunta rito. I told him that Kuya Roel

will pick him up when he’s ready. Tutal, nagluluto pa lang naman si Mommy ng

food.

sevirous: kabahan ka na papalitan na kita bilang anak ng mommy mo

I laughed before typing my reply.

elydezma: Bilisan mo. My mom will get mad.

sevirous: wait lang kinakausap pa kami ni coach hahahaha text ko na lang si

kuya roel

Kumunot ang noo ko.

elydezma: YOU HAVE HIS NUMBER?!

sevirous: oo hiningi niya bakit?

elydezma: WHAT WHY

sevirous: para raw alam niya kung saan ka hahanapin kapag nawawala ka hahaha

lol

Napasapo ako sa noo ko at magtytype na sana ng reply kaso tinawag ako ni Mommy

para tulungan sila sa kusina. Napanguso ako at sumunod.

“You should start practicing how to cook,” she handed me the vegetables. “Not

for your future husband but for yourself.”

“I don’t have a talent in cooking, Mommy,” I pouted.

“It’s a skill. You can learn it.”

Tinuruan niya ‘ko kung paano maghiwa. I tried to do it myself but I

accidentally scraped my finger.

“Ah! Mommy!” I panicked and washed the blood with running water.

“Elyse! Ano ba naman ‘yan!” Pinagalitan niya ‘ko kaagad.

“Ayan,” Ida laughed. “Lagot ka, Eli! Mapuputol daliri mo!”

I glared at her and looked at my finger. Nahiwa lang naman pero hindi ganoon

kalaki. Hinatak ako paupo ni Mommy at ginamot ang sugat ko, saka nilagyan ng

band aid. I pouted while she was scolding me. How was that my fault? I already

told her that I was bad at cooking!

Because of that, my mom asked me to step out of the kitchen. Ngumuso ako at

umakyat na lang sa kwarto ko para mag-shower at magpalit ng damit. Nagsuot na

lang ako ng light blue shorts at white off-shoulder blouse. I put a minimal

makeup and sprayed perfume.

“Oh my god!” Muntik na ‘kong mahulog sa vanity chair ko nang marinig ang

doorbell dahil sa pagmamadaling lumabas ng kwarto.

“Eli! Careful!” Sigaw ni Mommy sa kusina nang makitang madapa-dapa na ‘ko sa

hagdan pababa.

I composed myself before opening the door.

“Good evening, Ma’am.. Parang hindi bagay.. Uhm.. Good-” I caught Sevi

practicing what to say.

“Hey,” bati ko.

“Oh shit, Mama!” He held his chest out of shock. “Ikaw pala ‘yan..”

He looked relieved when he saw me. He was probably expecting for my mom to

open the door like last time. I laughed and looked at him from head to toe to

admire his outfit.

He was wearing a pair of black shorts, and then a white pullover sweater. I

think he also fixed his hair with wax? He smelled good, too. Parang hindi

galing sa game kanina, ah.

“My mom’s waiting for you,” binuksan ko ang pinto.

“‘Yung dad mo?” Kinakabahang tanong niya.

“Still in America. Sa Friday pa uwi niya,” maikling sagot ko.

Napatingin siya bigla sa leeg ko at napangisi nang makitang suot ko ang

necklace niya. Suot ko naman siya palagi pero ngayon niya lang napansin!

“Sevi! Come and eat!” Tawag ni Mommy kaya nagmamadaling pumunta roon si Sevi

sa dining.

Sumunod ako at umupo ulit sa tabi niya. My mom congratulated him about the

game but Sevi said it wasn’t over yet. It was a casual dinner. However, Sevi

was so nervous he looked like he wasn’t breathing anymore.

“Are you okay?” I held his hand under the table.

My mom took a call again so she had to go to the study room. Doon lang

nakahinga nang maluwag si Sevi at napainom pa ng tubig.

“Eli, nandyan na driver ko,” tumayo si Ida at kinuha ang mga gamit niya.

“You’re going na?” I acted lonely.

She leaned to give me a kiss on the cheek but stopped to whisper something in

my ear.

“Stop faking your loneliness. You’re probably happy that I’m leaving,” she

laughed.

Umirap ako at hinatid na siya sa may pinto. I was left with Sevi sa dining.

Tapos na kaming dalawa kumain kaya hindi ko na alam ang gagawin ko.

“Are you going home na?” I asked, standing beside his chair.

“Hindi pa. Hihintayin ko pa Mommy mo para makapagpaalam,” tumayo siya at

liligpitin na sana ang plato pero naunahan na siya ng helper namin.

“Matagal pa siya, though,” I informed him.

“Okay lang,” he shrugged. “Hintayin ko na lang dito.”

Pumunta siya sa sofa at dahan-dahang umupo roon. Umupo rin ako sa tabi niya.

We were both silent. Hindi ko alam ang sasabihin ko. The living room felt so

open for me. Hindi ako makapagsalita or makagalaw man lang.

“Let’s go out for a walk,” aya ko sa kanya. “I have something to show you.”

Tumango siya at tumayo mula sa pagkakaupo niya sa sofa. Kinuha ko ang banner

sa bag ko at tinupi ‘yon para itago sa likod ko. He didn’t notice it until we

reached the garden.

“Ano? Nasaan?” He stopped walking and looked around.

“Uhm,” umatras ako sa kanya kaya nagtaka siya lalo.

“Ano ‘yan?” Turo niya sa hawak ko sa likod ko.

“Your banner?”

Binuksan ko sa harapan niya ‘yung banner kanina. He tilted his head a little

to the right, still confused why I brought it here.

“Nakita ko na ‘yan kanina,” he informed me.

“Are you sure?” I raised my brows.

“Hindi ako sure?” He joked and laughed.

I bit the insides of my cheek and walked backwards again. His brows furrowed,

getting more confused.

“You saw this?”

Binaliktad ko ang banner at pinakita sa kanya kung ano ang nasa likod.

Napakunot ang noo niya at binasa ang naroon. I saw how his eyes went wide and

how his face heated after reading it.

‘I like you’

“I.. Uhm.. like you,” I laughed awkwardly and looked away. “It’s a

confession.”

:)

12

“So.. tayo na?”

Hiyang-hiya kong tinupi ulit ang banner at umupo sa may bench, facing the

fountain in front of us. Sevi remained standing in front of me, smiling.

“Uhm.. I don’t know,” I said in a small voice.

“Okay lang naman kahit hindi. Manliligaw pa rin naman ako,” niluhod niya ang

isang tuhod sa harapan ko para makita nang maayos ang mukha ko.

“I want a relationship with you,” I bit my lower lip, getting more embarrassed

now.

“Huh?” Gulat na sabi niya at natawa saglit. “Hindi naman ako nagmamadali. Okay

lang. Kaya naman kitang hintayin hanggang sa maka-graduate ka-”

“Ganoon din ‘yon, e!” I pouted.

“E, anong gusto mong gawin ko?” He sighed and reached for my hand. “Ano ba

talaga? Ikaw, kung anong gusto mo okay lang sa’kin.”

“I already told you that I want a relationship with you. We like each other!

Let’s be together!” Inis na sabi ko. I kept on repeating it!

“Hindi ka pa pwedeng mag-boyfriend,” he chuckled.

“They won’t know!” I pouted. “Wait for me to graduate, then I’ll tell Dad. 2

years na lang naman! Let’s keep it a secret for now, I guess. Is that okay?”

Matagal niya ‘kong tinignan para mag-isip pero tumango na lang rin bago tumayo

at umupo sa tabi ko. I held his hand and squeezed it a bit. He looked like he

was thinking so deep so I tried to snap him out of it. We did not need to

overthink this one.

“Have you ever entered a relationship before?” I asked him out of curiosity.

“Highschool,” he shrugged.

“College?” Sumingkit ang mga mata ko.

“Uh.. Wala naman. Landian lang,” he chuckled. “Sinusubukan kong mag move on

kay Luna noon, e. Hindi rin gumana.. Pero huwag na natin ‘to pag-usapan.”

“Ilang years mo na siyang gusto?” I actually didn’t want to know. “Does she

know?”

“Since highschool,” he shrugged. “Alam niya na ngayon. Inamin ko sa kanya nung

nag-break sila ng boyfriend niya. Wala lang. Sabi ko sa sarili ko, kung gusto

kong pakawalan ‘yung nararamdaman ko, dapat aminin ko.”

“And then?”

“E’di wala. Magkaibigan pa rin kami,” he intertwined our hands together. “Iba

na gusto ko. Galing ‘no? Magic!”

Umirap ako at inis na binitawan ang kamay niya. Tinawanan niya ang reaksyon ko

at kinuha ulit para hawakan nang mahigpit. I wasn’t really insecure of myself.

It was just that.. they had been together for so long! She probably knew him

the best! Better than I knew him!

Ugh! Bakit kasi late na kami nagkakilala?! We should have met years ago! Oh,

wait.. Minor pa ‘ko noon. Let’s not put him in jail.

How could Luna resist this guy?! He was everything I wanted. Women would

probably form a long line just to stand a chance on him. Nakakainis.

Anyway, I should still thank her for rejecting Sevi. Kung hindi niya ginawa

‘yon, I wouldn’t be here with him.

Napatayo kaming dalawa ni Sevi sa bench nang marinig ko ang tawag ni Mommy.

Umalis na rin si Sevi kaagad pagkatapos magpaalam kay Mommy. The moment I

closed the door, Mommy called me to the living room.

“Do you like him?” My mom asked, smiling.

“Why are you asking, Mommy?” I looked away, dodging the question.

“Because I want you to be happy, Eli,” she sighed. “If you like him, I will

support you. If you don’t, then I’ll stop inviting him over. Forget about your

dad. Dads are naturally strict. As for me, as long as you know your limitations, it's fine."

"We're.. Uhm.. We haven't talked about it but thank you, Mom," I lied.

"He's a great guy," my mom nodded, smiling. "He's a gentleman, he's nice, he's easy to get along with, and he treats you right. Not to mention that he has his goals straight. He's a great guy."

"He really is," I smiled. "Don't worry, Mom."

"I'm not worried about you. I'm worried about him," my mom laughed.

"Mommy!" Sumimangot ako.

She laughed again but stopped when she felt out of breath. She clenched her chest and reached for the glass of water placed above the coffee table. I immediately stood up and gave it to her.

"You're taking your meds, right?" I asked, worrying about her health.

"Yes, love," she smiled at me again. "Don't worry about me."

"Maybe you should lessen your workload. Stress is not good for you, Mommy," I tried to convince her. "Wait until I graduate. I will help you."

"I'm fine, Elyse. Focus on your studies. Mom can handle this."

I stared at her for a second before nodding. Umakyat na 'ko sa kwarto ko at

humiga sa kama. For the next 3 days, there was actually nothing going on. Sevi

became too busy preparing for the last game and I was too busy with my

studies.

From: Sevi

kita tayo :(

I giggled and texted him ‘okay’. Friday ‘yon at wala kaming class kaya bago pa

makauwi si Daddy, nagpahatid na ‘ko kay Kuya Roel papuntang UST. I was just

wearing a pair of black leggings, mustard yellow tank top, and black bomber

jacket with floral designs on the shoulder. I braided my hair, too, and wore

Sevi’s necklace.

I jumped on my seat when my dad called me on messenger. Dali-dali kong sinagot

‘yon habang nasa kotse.

“Hi, Dad,” I greeted casually. “Pauwi ka na?”

[Hi, Eli. Actually that’s the reason why I called. My flight was cancelled and

moved next week so can you tell Roel not to pick me up tonight? Anyway, how

are you?]

“Your flight’s cancelled?” I tried my best not to sound so happy! “I’m fine,

Dad. I’ll tell Kuya Roel.”

[You aren’t spending all my money there, right?] He chuckled.

“No! It has been weeks since my last shopping!” Ngayon ko lang napansin ‘yun,

ah! They really threatened me that they will sell my old bags if I keep on

buying stuff. “Enjoy America, Dad! I miss you na.”

[You really do, huh?] He wasn’t convinced. [Okay, then. I need to go. Have

fun. Love you.]

“Love you, Dad!” I said before ending the call. “Kuya Roel, cancelled flight

ni Daddy.”

“Okay po, Ma’am,” Kuya Roel nodded.

I was smirking on my seat, trying not to be so happy about it but I can’t help

it. I felt guilty tuloy! I should think of my dad’s safety right now. Masama

kasi ang weather kaya siguro na-cancel ang flight.

“Is it going to rain?” I opened the car window to look at the sky.

“Mukha nga po, Ma’am,” sagot naman ni Kuya Roel.

“I don’t have an umbrella,” bulong ko sa sarili ko.

Maybe my boyfriend has one!

My boyfriend!

Para akong mababaliw, sinasabi ko pa lang ‘yung word. I can’t wait to tell everyone! For now, I just want us to stay lowkey like before. I really don’t post often din naman sa social media. We can do that. As long as we know that we’re together, it’s fine. We don’t need to tell other people.

Pagkarating ko sa UST, madilim na. I told Kuya Roel to just stay in carpark because it might rain later. I also gave him money if ever magugutom siya. May bilihan kasi ng food sa baba ng carpark, e. He can eat there while waiting for me.

“I’m here na,” I answered Sevi’s call.

[Saan dito?]

“Kakababa ko lang ng carpark. Where are you?” I asked again.

[Papunta na sa’yo.]

Lumingon ako sa paligid para hanapin siya pero puro studyanteng hindi ko kilala ang dumadaan. Tumawid ako sa may carpark at pumunta sa may open space sa tapat ng main building nila, near their tiger statue. I looked around again, hoping to find him.

I yelled when someone covered my eyes. Agad niya ‘kong binitawan nang marinig

ang tili ko.

“Ano ba!” Hinampas ko si Sevi sa braso nang humarap ako sa kanya.

“Baka akala nila kung ano nang ginawa ko sa’yo,” humawak siya sa dibdib niya

at tumingin sa paligid. “Bakit ka sumigaw?”

“I thought I would get kidnapped or something!” Hinampas ko siya ulit, naiinis

na. Gabi pa naman!

He was still wearing their jersey shorts and then white shirt. He had his

duffel bag on his shoulder, halatang galing sa training.

“Kumain ka na? Kain muna tayo,” inakbayan niya ‘ko kaya nawala na ang inis ko

sa kanya.

Naglakad kami papunta sa may malapit na chicken wings restaurant. It was

another cheat day for me. Pagkapasok namin, maraming kumakain. Almost all of

them are Thomasians. I could tell because of their uniforms.

“Uy,” Sevi greeted some people he knew.

Ang dami niyang kilala. Ako na ang naghanap ng upuan. Nakahanap ako sa may

pinakagilid kaya umupo ako roon habang siya ay nakikipag-usap sa tropa niya

ata or what. He laughed and hit the guy lightly on his arm before turning

around, looking for me.

He panicked for a bit when he didn’t see me around but felt relieved when I raised my hand to call for his attention. He was such a baby. Para siyang nawala sa grocery store. I rolled my eyes.

“Girlfriend mo, master?” The engineering guy asked.

“Ah, oo,” Sevi laughed.

“Tangina mo, pre, may jowa ka na?” Gulat na sabi nung isa pang engineering at tumawa.

“Puta, naka-uto ka, master,” another guy laughed.

“Anong gayuma ginamit mo? Mukhang effective, master,” the guy gave Sevi a thumbs up.

“Kaya pala enjoy na enjoy mo ‘yung Marriage and Family, ah.”

“Bobo niyo, siya ‘yung last time sa Wendy’s,” he told them. “Kumain na nga kayo dyan.”

Umupo na si Sevi sa harapan ko at nag-order na rin ng kakainin namin. He was always the one ordering food for us because I couldn’t pick. I was so picky with food pero lahat ng inoorder niya, kinakain ko.

“Your blockmates?” I asked him.

“Oo, sila ‘yung nanggulo rin dati,” he chuckled.

“Hoy, Seb! ML!” Sigaw ulit nung mga ka-block niya.

“Awit, pass ako, pre. Babe time,” Sevi smirked.

“Yabang mo, gago!”

“Ayain uminom ‘yan!”

Nag-kantyawan pa sila roon. They were so loud! Mabuti hindi naiingayan sa

kanila ang ibang kumakain. Probably because everyone was really loud.

Nagpahalumbaba ako sa table at tinitigan si Sevi.

“Why did you want to see me today?” I looked for something we can talk about.

“Ah, kinakabahan ako bukas,” pag-amin niya. “Gusto ko lang kalimutan saglit.

Manonood ka naman, diba?”

“Yes,” I nodded. “Just do what you always do, but better. It’s your last game

na, right? Whatever happens tomorrow, it won’t change the fact that you’re a

great player. You will be remembered in UAAP.”

“Hindi ko na nga iniisip na manalo, e,” Sevi smiled. “Basta ma-enjoy ko lang.

Okay na ‘yun, ‘no?”

“You can enjoy while aiming to win,” I held his hand and squeezed it a bit to

give him comfort. “Do what makes you happy.”

“Kung magkatabi lang tayo, niyakap na kita, e,” he chuckled.

Naputol ang pag-uusap namin nang dumating na ang pagkain. Sinuot ko ang

plastic gloves katulad ng ginawa ni Sevi. He taught me how to eat chicken

wings properly. I didn’t even know that there was a ‘proper way’. Ang dami

niyang alam!

I laughed when the wing suddenly went to his direction while I was trying to

pull the bones.

“O, lumilipad pa,” Sevi shook his head.

“I’m sorry,” I was still laughing.

Sevi gave the wing back to me and helped me with it. Pagkatapos, tinanggal

niya ang plastic gloves niya at kumuha ng tissue. I stopped when he suddenly

wiped my mouth, looking serious.

“Kalat, ah,” he laughed. “Pero okay lang. Cute mo.”

Hindi ako nagsalita at tahimik na lang na kumain, nahihiya na. I probably

looked like a mess but he also looked like he didn’t care about it. Nang

maubos na namin, tinanggal ko na ang gloves at ako na ang nagpunas sa sarili

ko.

We paid half-half for the food. We always do that unless one of us would volunteer to pay for it. After paying, we stood up and left the restaurant.

Napapikit ako nang mariin nang makitang malakas ang ulan sa labas.

“Shit. I don’t have an umbrella,” I looked at Sevi.

Hinalungkat ni Sevi ang bag niya at nilabas ang foldable na umbrella. He clicked the button and it opened. It was not small but it wasn’t big either.

He made me wear his I.D. before giving me the umbrella.

“Sa’yo na. Tatakbo na lang ako,” sabi niya.

“No! You might get sick. You have a game tomorrow,” binalik ko kaagad sa kanya.

“Pucha, baka bumaha na mamaya,” tinignan niya ang gilid ng daan. “Kailangan mo na umuwi nyan. Tara na.”

Umakbay siya sa’kin at sumilong kaming dalawa sa payong. Pagkatapak ko pa lang sa gilid ng daan, napatili na ‘ko dahil nabasa ang sapatos ko. We walked fast until we reached the gate. Basang-basa na kami nang makasilong na sa loob ng UST.

“Are you okay?” I laughed at us.

“Basa na sapatos ko, pucha,” sinara niya na ulit ang payong at tinignan ako.

“Ikaw? ‘Yung sapatos mo. Mahal pa naman ‘yan.”

I looked at my white sneakers. “It’s fine. It will survive.”

“Sure ka? Sorry,” he felt bad. “Pinapunta pa kita rito. Hindi ko alam na uulan.”

“Oh come on!” I rolled my eyes and hit him lightly on his chest. “It’s fine! I wanted to be here, okay? These are just shoes!”

Kinuha ko ang panyo ko sa bag at lumapit sa kanya. I held his hand and started wiping his wet arm and shoulder. Nakatingin lang siya sa’kin habang ginagawa ko ‘yon, mukhang gulat. Mas nabasa siya sa’kin dahil may suot akong jacket.

“Just stay here. Huwag mo na ‘kong ihatid sa carpark,” I told him.

“Ihahatid na kita,” nagpumilit pa siya.

“I know the way now. Mababasa ka pa so you should just stay here. I have a jacket.”

Hinubad ko ang jacket ko at tinakip sa may ulo ko. He held my arm to stop me from walking. Inis tuloy akong lumingon sa kanya at tinanggal ‘yon.

“I’m fine, Sevi,” I convinced him before running away.

The rain was pouring so hard. I stopped running when I couldn’t feel the rain

anymore. Lumingon ako kay Sevi at sinamaan siya ng tingin dahil sumunod pa rin

siya sa’kin, dala-dala ang payong!

“Hahatid kita,” seryosong sabi niya, galit na.

Tumango na lang ako at hinayaan siya dahil mukhang magagalit pa siya sa’kin

kapag hindi. Pareho na tuloy kaming nabasa ng ulan! Huminto lang kami sa tapat

ng carpark. Kinuha ko ulit ang panyo ko at pinunasan ang braso niyang nabasa.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” paalam ko.

Tumango siya at kumaway sa’kin bago ako umakyat sa carpark. Nagulat si Kuya

Roel nang makitang basa ako pagkarating ko. Kumuha kaagad siya ng dyaryo at

nilatag sa may sahig ng kotse bago ako sumakay.

The next day, Ida and I came early for Game 3. I was still wearing Sevi’s

jersey partnered with a pair of black shorts and white sandals.

“It’s now or never, Ida,” I told her while we were on the line. Ang tagal

magpapasok sa loob, e. “Hold this one. Sa’yo ‘yan.”

Inabot ko sa kanya ang bagong banner na gawa ko.

‘YOU CAN DO THIS, CAPTAIN!

SEVI nila magaling kang player! #GoTigers’

“This is mine,” kinuha ko ang cartolina. It was a cartolina this time.

‘LET’S GO, BABE!

Ikaw lang ‘yan! #CameROAR #GoUSTe’

“Hoy, ang landi! Anong babe?!” Turo kaagad ni Ida nang mabasa ang nakalagay.

“What the hell did I miss?! May endearment na?!”

Hindi na ‘ko nakasagot dahil umandar na ang pila at pinapasok na kami sa loob.

Ida got us the same seats. Malapit nanaman kami sa bench ng UST kaya nakita ko

kaagad si Sevi na kausap ang coach nila. He was wearing their white jersey and

then white knee support. When he stood up and faced the bleachers, I covered

my face with my bag.

“Eli, nakatingin pa rin siya rito so stop covering your face,” Ida whispered.

Tinanggal ko ang bag at nakitang masama ang tingin ni Sevi sa’kin, gesturing

me to come over. I stood up and walked down the steps until I reached the

railings. Lumapit siya roon at sinandal ang braso niya para mapalapit sa’kin.

“Kinakabahan ako,” unang sabi niya sa’kin.

Sumimangot ako at hinawakan ang mukha niya gamit ang dalawang kamay, forcing

him to look at me. He pursed his lips and stared at my eyes.

“Listen,” I sighed. “I don’t care if mananalo kayo or matatalo. At least, you reached the finals, right? It’s already an achievement. Go out there and enjoy, but don’t forget to do your best so you won’t have any regrets.”

“Ahh,” he looked up and sighed.

“Good luck. You can do this!” I cheered for him.

He reached for my waist and pulled me closer so he can kiss my cheek. My face heated after the kiss. Pakiramdam ko ang daming nakakita!

“Thank you,” he whispered.

“Go na. Tawag ka na,” I pushed him lightly.

Tumango siya at tumalikod na. Umakyat na rin ako sa steps at umupo sa upuan ko. Hinampas kaagad ko ni Ida sa binti nang makabalik ako. Mas kinikilig pa siya kaysa sa’kin!

“Ate, boyfriend mo po si Camero?” May kumalabit sa’kin.

“Uh, yeah,” I answered awkwardly.

“Ano ba ‘yan! Swerte naman!” Parang galit pa siya. “Gusto ko rin!”

I shifted on my seat uncomfortably. Nang magsimula ang laro, tinuon ko na ang sarili ko sa court. First quarter pa lang, sobrang lamang na ng Ateneo. They

were really good, I must admit that. Still, I cheered with the crowd. The players needed motivation.

“GO SEVI! GO SEVI!” I yelled, waving my banner. “Oh no!”

He fell on the floor. Lumapit ‘yung isa nilang player para tulungan siyang tumayo. He still smiled at the Ateneo guy kahit binangga siya. The crowd was mad, though! Kung ano-anong sinasabi sa lalaki, yelling foul.

During the second quarter, lamang pa rin ang Ateneo. Nang mag-timeout, pagod nang bumalik si Sevi sa bench at uminom ng tubig. He looked at me and laughed when he saw my banner. Muntik pa siyang masamid sa tubig niya.

He rested for a bit. Naabutan ng UST ang score during the third quarter. The atmosphere became really heated during the last quarter. Nakatayo na ulit ang lahat at sinisigaw na ang cheer. I was standing, too, waving my banner so hard. Muntik ko nang mapunit nang maka-shoot si Sevi.

“LET’S GO, SEVI!” I yelled again. “GO UST! HABOL TAYO!”

Napaupo ako sa sobrang stress nang nakapasok lahat ng free throw ng Ateneo.

Kaunting segundo na lang ang natitira at nakalamang nanaman sila.

“I don’t want to see this. I’m going to cry,” I covered my face.

I sighed heavily when I heard the buzzer. Ateneo celebrated their win.

Everyone in our side looked so quiet but they still clapped.

“It’s fine,” I whispered.

“Yeah,” tumango si Ida, malungkot din.

Tumayo ako nang makitang yumakap kay Sevi ‘yung dalawa nilang player, probably

tearing up. Sevi was smiling, tapping the both of them on the back. Naglakad

ako pababa at huminto sa may steps.

Nakatayo lang ako roon at pinanood kung paano makipagkamay si Sevi sa players

ng Ateneo. He was still smiling but I knew how painful it was for him to spend

his last year like this. I gave him time with the players.

When he saw me, he gave me a small smile and walked towards me. Pumasok siya

sa may railings at sinalubong ako sa may hagdanan. I welcomed him with open

arms until he stopped one step lower and hugged me tightly.

“I’m still so proud of you,” I whispered on him.

Binaon niya ang mukha sa leeg ko. I felt him crying on my neck. Mas lalo lang

tuloy akong nalungkot.

“Shhh, it’s fine. You did your best, baby,” hinaplos ko ang likod niya,

pinapatahan siya.

He was still crying in silence. I could feel his tears. Hinigpitan ko ang

yakap sa kanya at hinaplos ang buhok niya.

“I’m so proud of you. I’m so proud of you, Captain,” I whispered repeatedly.

I smiled at some people looking at us. Mukhang malungkot din sila at gustong

i-comfort si Sevi pero hindi na lang nag-abala.

“You’re the best player for me, okay?” I consoled him.

Kumalma na rin siya at binitawan ako. He couldn’t look at me. He was just

trying to wipe his tears with his backhand. Kinuha ko ang panyo ko at

hinawakan ang pisngi niya para punasan din ang luha niya.

“You did great, babe,” I smiled at him.

“Thank you,” he gave me back a small smile.

“Go there na. Celebrate with your team. You guys did good. I’ll see you later,

okay?”

I kissed his cheek before letting him go back to the court. Bumaba siya sa

stairs at babalik na sana pero napalingon sa tatlong babaeng lumapit sa kanya.

Sila Luna. Niyakap nila si Sevi at tinapik-tapik ang balikat nito. Nakita kong

tumawa si Sevi sa sinabi nila Luna. Hindi ko alam kung ano ‘yon but at least

he laughed.

“Let’s go, Ida,” aya ko sa kanya. I caught her taking a picture kaya nataranta

pa siya. “Airdrop mo na lang!”

Pagkarating namin sa bahay, wala si Mommy so I just texted her that we will

celebrate Sevi’s win. She couldn’t come dahil mag-oovertime sila sa office, so

nagpatulong na lang ako kay Ida magluto.

“I really can’t do this,” sumimangot ako, nakatitig sa ingredients sa harapan

ko.

“E, anong gagawin natin? Why don’t we just order food?” Ida suggested.

“No, I want to make an effort!”

Kinuha ko ang phone ko at nanood ng cooking videos. I wanted to cook pasta

dahil ‘yon ang madali para sa’kin. It was a scam! Hindi siya madali!

“Okay na ba ‘to?” Tanong ko kay Ida.

“Why the hell is it salty?!” Reklamo niya at kinuha ang jar para tignan kung

anong nilagay ko.

“Is it supposed to taste sweet?” Reklamo ko sa kanya.

“It’s carbonara! Who told you to put salt?! My god! Did the video tell you to

put that?” Ida massaged her head.

“I don’t have pepper!”

“So you put salt instead? This won’t do! Baka malason si Sevi dyan!”

“Then let’s just add sugar!”

“No!”

Ida and I tried to fix the taste of the sauce. Siya na ang nagluto ng pasta.

Good thing hindi nasunog ang pasta! Ida was better than cooking. I really

can’t cook!

“Oh my gosh, he’s here!” I panicked when I heard the door bell. “Prepare the

food, Ida!”

Nagmamadali akong tumakbo at binuksan ang pinto. Sevi’s brows furrowed as he

looked at my dirty shirt. He was wearing a grey sweater and black shorts. Kung

anong kina-fresh niya, iyon ang kinarumi ng suot ko.

“I.. was cooking,” I said shyly.

“Weh? Marunong ka magluto?” He seemed excited.

Binuksan ko ang pinto at inaya siya papunta sa dining. Ida was already setting

up the table. Nang ilapag ang pasta at sauce, umupo na kami. Umiwas ako ng

tingin at tinignan ang sauce sa harapan ko, pinag-iisipan kung titikman ko ba

muna o si Sevi na lang.

“Mommy mo?” Sevi asked, looking around.

“Overtime sa work,” sagot ko. “Wala rin si Daddy. Next week pa uuwi.”

“Ah,” tumango si Sevi. “Ayos, gutom na ‘ko. Luto mo ‘to?”

Nanahimik kami ni Ida habang kumukuha siya ng pagkain. Hinalo niya ‘yon sa

plato niya at inikot sa tinidor bago kinain. I was staring at him, waiting for

his reaction.

He coughed a little and reached for the glass of water. He covered his mouth,

trying to contain his cough.

Sinalinan ko ng tubig ang baso niya bago niya ininuman ‘yon. He swallowed so

hard I got nervous. Bakit wala siyang sinasabi? Wala siyang reaction! Umubo

lang siya!

“How was it?” I asked.

“Ah,” he coughed. “Okay.. lang. Okay naman. Tikman mo.”

Inabot niya sa’kin ang plato niya para matikman ko rin. When I took a bite, my

brows furrowed. Why did it taste.. different?! Bakit ganoon ang lasa?! Parang

may kakaiba!

“Anong nilagay mo dyan?” Sevi laughed.

“Shit, it’s so bad,” Ida laughed so loud after tasting the sauce. “Buti na

lang uuwi na ‘ko!”

“What?!” Gulat akong lumingon sa kanya.

“Dad called,” tumayo siya at humalik sa pisngi ko. “Enjoy your meal, guys!

Don’t poison yourselves!”

Nang mawala siya, natahimik ako. I couldn’t even look at the food! Parang

nasusuka ako. Binawi ko ang plato ni Sevi at tumayo para ibalik sa kusina.

“Uy, okay naman, e. Akin na, uubusin ko na,” hinawakan ni Sevi ang kamay ko.

“Wag na,” I pouted.

“May ingredients ka pa dyan?”

Tinuro ko ang kusina. Kaunti lang ang sauce na niluto namin kaya mayroon pang

natira na ingredients. Kumuha siya ng bowl at kumuha ng ingredients sa loob ng

ref. Umupo ako sa may breakfast table at pinanood siyang magluto.

“You know how to cook?” I asked him.

“Dapat lang,” he chuckled.

Umakyat muna ako sa kwarto para magpalit ng damit dahil nadumihan na nga ako.

Naka maong shorts na lang ako at white sweater. Inayos ko rin ang sarili ko at

naglagay ng lip tint. Pagkababa ko, patapos na si Sevi.

“Tikman mo muna,” inalok sa’kin ni Sevi ang kutsara na may kaunting sauce.

I tasted it and gave him a nod. Ngumiti siya at sinalin na ang sauce sa

lalagyanan bago dinala sa dining. I felt so embarrassed! I cooked for him to

cheer him up pero bandang huli, siya rin ang nagluto para sa amin!

After eating, our helper already took care of our plates. Tumayo ako at

hinawakan ang kamay niya para hatakin din siya papunta sa sala. We sat there

silently, hindi alam ang sasabihin. I looked around and saw some helpers

looking at us. I felt awkward.

“It’s raining outside, right?” Sumilip ako sa bintana.

“Oo,” sagot niya at tinignan din.

We can’t go outside for a walk. Ayoko namang manatili rito. It was

uncomfortable.

“Do you want to..” I looked down and played with my hands.

“Ano?” He looked at me innocently.

“Nevermind,” I sighed.

“Ano ‘yun?” He got more curious now. Humarap siya sa’kin, inaabangan ang

sasabihin ko. “Sabihin mo na.”

“Do you want to go to my room?” I asked awkwardly.

:)

13

“Bakit? Ayoko. Anong gagawin natin doon?”

Ngumuso ako nang tanggihan niya ‘ko. I knew it! Kaya hindi ko masabi kasi iba

ang iisipin niya pero naiilang talaga ako sa living room dahil may mga

nakatingin. I mean, we can just go to my room and play a video game or

whatever!

“Don’t you want to see my room? This is the only chance,” I tried to convince

him more. “My dad will come home na next week. Hindi ka na makakapunta rito.”

“Ano bang mayroon sa kwarto mo?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“Wala! I just want to show you!”

He sighed and looked away, frustrated. He pursed his lips and stared at the

floor, thinking about something. Ang lalim ng iniisip niya at hindi ko mabasa.

After a while, he sighed again and nodded.

“Saglit lang, ah,” he made sure of that.

“Yeah,” tuwang tuwa akong tumayo at hinawakan ang kamay niya para hatakin din

siya patayo. “This way!”

Hinatak ko siya paakyat sa hagdan. Ang bagal niya pang maglakad kaya nahirapan

akong hatakin siya. We went through the hallway until we stopped in front of a

white door. Binitawan ko ang kamay niya at binuksan ang pinto, showing him my

room.

He looked from the outside, refusing to go in.

“Come in!” I opened the door wider and stepped sideways to give him way.

“Huwag na. Nakita ko na,” he bit his lower lip and shook his head.

“Come on! Please?” I held his hand and convinced him using my eyes. “Please?

You’ll look so awkward out there!”

“Mas awkward pa ata sa’kin ang pumasok dyan,” Sevi chuckled.

“Bakit ba ayaw mo? You’re probably thinking of doing something else, ‘no?”

Pinagsingkitan ko siya ng mata.

“Hindi, ah,” tanggi niya kaagad.

Because he wanted to prove a point, he stepped inside and looked around,

crossing his arms over his chest. I smiled and closed the door just to give us

privacy. Kinuha ko ang light remote ko at pinakita sa kanya.

“Look! This one’s amazing!” I changed the color of the room to purple.

My room was pastel in color. Mainly pink and white kaya maliwanag siyang

tignan. I had a queen-size bed at the center with so many stuff toys placed

above the blanket. Sa tabi noon ay side table and a cute lamp. May sofa rin

ako na color grey so I told Sevi that he can sit there. Umupo naman siya,

hindi nagsasalita.

Binalik ko na ang ilaw sa white at umupo sa kama ko. We were so far from each

other! Halatang ayaw niya ‘kong lapitan!

Tumayo na lang ako at naglakad palapit sa kanya. I saw how his eyes panicked a

bit when he saw me walking towards him. Umusog siya sa sofa nang maupo ako sa

tabi niya. I placed the remote at the side of the couch and looked at him.

“Are you breathing?” I was worried. “Is it hot?”

“Hindi naman,” Sevi put the back of his hand on his forehead, wiping the

sweat.

“Then why are you sweating? I think it’s hot,” tumayo ako at kinuha ang remote

ng aircon para buksan.

Sevi looked tall in my small couch. Hindi ako sanay na may matangkad na lalaki

sa loob ng kwarto ko. Si Ida pa lang ang friend na pinapapasok ko sa room ko

kaya seeing Sevi here inside was so unusual.

“Are you still sad about the game?” Umupo ulit ako sa tabi niya.

I placed my leg on the couch and faced him. He couldn’t look at me! Naiinis

ako! Hinawakan ko tuloy ang mukha niya at hinarap sa’kin para makita ko siya.

“Answer my question,” inis na sabi ko.

“Ah, anong game?” Parang wala siya sa sarili niya!

“The game!” I repeated. “‘Yung kanina! Gosh, are you okay?”

“Ahh,” he nodded. “Ngayon ko na nga lang ulit naalala, e. Wala.. Malungkot pa

rin, siyempre. Pero ganoon talaga, e. Wala na ‘kong magagawa roon.”

“It must be hard to leave,” I felt sad for him. “It’s okay. You were a great

captain.”

“Sana nga,” he chuckled and looked away.

Lumapit ako sa kanya at niyakap siya pagilid. I placed my head on his shoulder

to give him comfort. Instead of relaxing, he stiffened because of my hug.

Ngumuso ako at sinandal ang baba ko sa balikat niya para tignan siya.

“Can you look at me, please?” I asked him.

Sevi inhaled a large amount of breath to calm himself. Then, he pursed his

lips and looked up, getting more frustrated.

“Pinagtitripan mo ba ‘ko?” Sevi raised a brow.

“What? Why?” Binitawan ko tuloy siya para makita ko siya nang maayos. “I don’t

get it, babe.”

“Tara na,” tumayo siya at hinawakan ang kamay ko para hatakin ako patayo rin

ng sofa. “Uuwi na ‘ko.”

“Too early!” Ngumuso ako at hindi nagpahatak sa kanya patayo ng sofa. Nanatili

akong nakaupo roon. “Just stay here for a few minutes!”

“Eli,” he warned.

I pouted and pulled him back to his seat. He sighed heavily before sitting

down, letting go of my hand. Nilagay niya na lang ang braso niya sa sandalan

ng sofa. His other hand was playing with his lips while he was staring at the

wall, obviously ignoring me.

Sumimangot ako at kinuha na lang ang phone ko para mag-scroll sa Facebook. My

eyes widened when I saw a video of two people kissing. I immediately turned my

phone off and placed it on the side.

“Ano?” Tanong ni Sevi nang makitang mataranta ako.

“Nothing,” I looked away, feeling awkward now.

Natahimik tuloy ako, thinking about Ate Mae’s words last time, isama na rin

sila Ate Raya, ‘yung tungkol sa kissing! My face heated, just thinking about

it! I mean.. I’m so curious. What does it feel like?

“Sevi,” I looked at him.

Seryoso siyang tumingin sa’kin at tinaasan ako ng isang kilay. Hindi ko alam

bakit ang tahimik at seryoso niya ngayon.

“Have you tried kissing?” I curiously asked.

He looked away in an instant like I said something so controversial. He

shifted on his seat uncomfortably, hindi malaman ang gagawin. So was that a

yes or a no? Bakit hindi niya sinasagot?

“Oo,” bulong niya na parang ayaw niyang marinig ko.

“What? Who?!” I felt jealous now.

“Wala, kung sino-sino lang,” mabilis na sagot niya.

“Kung sino-sino?!” Napatayo na ‘ko sa inis.

“Hindi!” Binawi niya kaagad.

I crossed my arms over my chest while glaring at him. Kung sino-sino, huh?!

For me, kisses were special pa naman! Tapos ang sagot niya sa kung sino-sino

lang? So kapag kiniss niya ‘ko, kung sino-sino lang din ako?

“Kinalimutan ko na kasi,” he tried to reach for my hand pero umatras ako para

hindi niya maabot. “Huwag mo na kasi tanungin ‘yung mga ganoon.”

“E, I’m curious!” Pagmamaktol ko pa. “Ako, wala pa ‘kong first kiss!”

Nanlaki ang mata ni Sevi at umiwas ng tingin sa’kin, nailang sa sinabi ko.

“Uh, okay,” he nodded. “Hindi ko alam kung dapat ko bang malaman ‘yon pero

sige.”

“Aren’t you curious? Ayaw mo bang malaman if I have history or what?” I raised

a brow.

“History ng ano?” He laughed at me. “Sorry ka. Bagsak ako sa history, e.”

Nakakainis naman siya kausap. Napansin niya atang nagtatampo na ‘ko kaya

pinilit niyang hawakan ang kamay ko para hatakin ako palapit. Nakatayo na ‘ko

sa gitna ng binti niya ngayon habang tinatawanan niya ‘ko.

“Bakit ka nagagalit?” He asked, smiling. “Sabihin mo sa’kin.”

“I wanted to talk about it seriously!”

Tumango siya at sumeryoso na para hindi na ‘ko mainis. He pulled me closer

until I was already straddling his hips. He placed his hands on my waist to

support my weight. Umupo ako sa binti niya habang nakaharap sa kanya, handa

nang makipag-usap.

“Sige na. Maayos na ‘kong makikipag-usap,” he urged me to talk.

“Okay, uhm,” I couldn’t talk now! Masyado siyang malapit sa’kin! “When are we

allowed to kiss?”

“Bakit gusto mong makipaghalikan?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“I’m curious?” I tilted my head a little to the side and blinked. “Why? You

don’t want it?”

Natahimik siya at matagal napatitig sa’kin, nag-iisip.

“Should I just find another guy to fill in my curiosity?” I wondered.

“Ah, sige,” sarkastikong sabi niya.

“I’m kidding!” Bawi ko kaagad.

He pushed me lightly so I would stand up and leave him. Nanatili ako sa harapan niya, tumatawa pa kaya naasar siya lalo. He looked so serious now and.. mad.

“Do you want to kiss now?” I asked him.

His jaw moved when he looked at me, trying to contain his emotions inside. Tinaasan niya lang ako ng kilay, ayaw sagutin ang tanong ko.

“Kiss?” I repeated. “I don’t know how to do it, though.”

“Why are you making it awkward?” His brows furrowed.

“I’m honest! Don’t you want honesty?!” Reklamo ko sa kanya.

Umusog pa ‘ko palapit sa kanya at humawak sa balikat niya para hindi ako tumaob palikod. He stared at my face for a moment before nodding. Parang sumusuko na siya.

“I’ll try,” determinadong sabi ko.

Tumango lang siya at tinignan ako, hinihintay na halikan ko siya. My heart skipped a beat when I leaned and stopped inches away from his lips. His lips

looked so kissable! How could someone have that healthy color?

I parted my lips a little before giving him a light kiss. His eyes closed a

little when he looked down on me.

Umayos ako ng upo at tumingin sa kanya, nahihiya na sa ginawa ko. My god, so

that was the feeling! Parang may malambot na ewan! I don’t know! I just placed

my lips on top of his. Hindi ko alam kung tama ba ‘yon!

Seryoso lang na nakatingin sa’kin si Sevi, hindi nagsasalita.

“Was that okay?” I asked him.

“Okay na ‘yon,” tumango siya.

“I’ll do it again!”

Hindi naman siya nag reklamo kaya lumapit ulit ako para mahalikan siya. He did

not respond to my deep kiss, basta hinayaan niya lang ako. Humawak ako sa

pisngi niya at tinagalan nang kaunti ang halik bago siya binitawan ulit.

“How do I taste like?” I curiously asked.

“Ewan ko,” Sevi chuckled. “Natikman ko ba?”

I sighed in embarrassment. Dahan-dahan akong tumango sa kanya at aalis na sana

sa pagkakaupo sa binti niya pero hinatak niya ang bewang ko palapit at nilagay

ang isang kamay sa pisngi ko. He angled his face before giving me a soft kiss.

I automatically closed my eyes when I felt him sucking on my lower lip. He

moved his lips a little and kissed me again before letting me go.

Pakiramdam ko pulang pula na ang pisngi ko nang tignan niya ‘ko. Dali-dali

akong umayos ng tayo at kinuha ang phone ko, handa nang ihatid siya sa baba.

Oh my god, I wanted that kind of kiss. It felt so good.

“T-tara.. Uhm.. Papahatid na kita kay Kuya Roel,” I stuttered!

“Okay,” he chuckled.

Bumaba na kaming dalawa at dumiretso sa labas. Mabuti na lang at wala pa rin

si Mommy kung hindi lagot ako! I knew the helpers would say nothing. Hindi

naman sila nangingialam. I can just say na naglaro kami ng arcade ni Sevi sa

taas.

“Bye,” paalam ni Sevi nang huminto na ‘yung kotse sa harapan ng steps.

“Uhm, b-bye,” I waved my hand a little. “I’ll.. Uh.. See you.”

“Magreply ka,” pagpapaalala niya sa’kin bago sumakay sa kotse.

Nang mawala siya sa paningin ko, tumakbo kaagad ako paakyat sa kwarto ko at

sinara ang pinto. Tumalon-talon ako at impit na sumigaw sa sobrang kilig. I

hugged the pillow tightly and touched my lips with my finger. Oh my god, he

kissed me! We kissed! I got my first kiss!

Tinawagan ko kaagad si Ida para ibalita sa kanya.

[Yes, hello? What’s the tea?] Bungad niya.

“Ida, guess what!” I was so excited.

[You had sex?]

“No!” Agad na tanggi ko. “But I got my first kiss!”

[Oh my gosh!] Narinig kong kumalampag ang sahig ni Ida. [Omg, nabitawan ko

‘yung phone! Anyway, how was it?! Masarap ba?! Omg! Anong feeling?!]

I opened up everything to Ida, hoping that it would lessen my kilig or

whatever, pero mukhang mas lumala lang! I was smiling the whole time she was

giving me advices on what to do next. I couldn’t help but take down notes

inside my head. I should really learn how to kiss! Sevi seemed experienced!

Anyway, since bumalik na si Daddy the next week, nagkikita na lang kami ni

Sevi twice a week kapag wala akong class. Naging busy na siya because of

finals and ako rin naging busy sa studies ko.

“We’re going to Japan for Christmas. Sayang, I couldn’t celebrate it with

you,” I pouted.

“Video call. May video call naman,” Sevi pinched my cheek and smiled.

Nasa mall kami ngayon. I asked him to come with me so he can help me pick

gifts for his family and also for my family. I wanted to buy them gifts, too.

Medyo walang sense nga lang since pera pa rin ni Daddy ang gagamitin ko. I

laughed at that.

“Mas maganda siguro kung may meaning ‘yung regalo mo. Hindi lang basta

designer bag,” Sevi suggested while I was looking for bags.

“What do you mean? This is for me,” I glared at him.

I was just looking, though! Wala naman akong plans na bumili. The last time I

bought a new one, my mom sold two old bags of mine. Napagkasunduan nila ni

Daddy na one new bag equates to two old bags na ibebenta. Well, I think I

could deal with that.

“What are your plans for Christmas?” I asked him.

“May charity work kami nila Kierra,” sagot niya naman.

“Wow, that’s so nice of you,” I whispered, getting inspired by him.

“Pwede kang mag-donate kung gusto mo. Si Sam may pakana nito, e.”

“Sam?” Kumunot ang noo ko. “Samantha Vera?”

“Oo, kilala mo?” Gulat na tanong niya sa’kin. “Ay, oo nga. Siyempre kilala mo

rin. Si Sam ‘yun, e. Lahat ata kilala non.”

Oh my god, that was so true. Friend niya rin pala si Samantha. I mean, hindi

naman kami ganoon ka-close but she was one of the very few people na hindi ko

hate. She was actually nice and she was never boring. Noong nakausap ko siya

once sa isang gathering, hindi ako nabored sa topics niya.

“Ihahatid namin si Hiro tomorrow sa airport,” I informed him.

“Ako rin, may pupuntahan ako bukas pagkatapos ng exam,” sambit niya sa’kin.

“Where?” My brows furrowed. Hindi niya pa sinasabi sa’kin ‘yun, ah.

“Nueva Ecija. May susunduin lang din kami nila Luna,” pagpapaliwanag niya.

Tumango ako at naglakad na palabas ng store. Pumunta kami sa department store

so I could buy Sofia a gift, and also sa brother niya na si Steven. I never

met him, though. Hindi pa ‘ko nagpupunta sa bahay nila pero plano ko bago ako

umalis papuntang Japan, bibisitahin ko muna ‘yung family niya para ibigay

‘yung gifts.

“You think Sofia would like this?” Pinakita ko ang doll kay Sevi.

“Hindi mo naman kailangan bilhan ‘yon ng ganyan kamahal. Ibabato lang din niya

‘yan,” Sevi chuckled. “Masisira pa. Sayang.”

“Just answer!” Inis na sabi ko. “Ano bang tinitignan mo dyan? That’s for

newborn babies!”

I caught him looking at baby clothes while I was here busy looking for dolls.

Hindi ko alam kung bakit nagtitingin siya ng mga pang-sanggol na damit. Hindi

naman na sanggol si Sofia!

“Uhm, hindi ‘yan kasya kay Sofia,” turo ko sa tinitignan niyang pink na

onesie.

“Hindi para kay Sofia,” he laughed and held my waist. “Manganganak na ‘yung

kaibigan ko, e.”

“Ito muna,” tinaas ko ang dalawang doll. “Pili ka muna anong mas maganda.”

“Eto,” Sevi held my chin and gave me a soft kiss.

Nahiya kaagad ako at tumingin sa paligid. Namula tuloy ang pisngi ko!

Tinalikuran ko siya at kinuha na lang ‘yung dalawa dahil hindi ako makapili.

Gosh, my heart was beating so fast I could have a heart attack.

Sevi bought two sets of clothes for his friend’s baby and I bought two dolls

for Sofia. Damit na lang din ang binili ko sa brother niya and then perfume sa

mom niya para madali. I hope they will like it. Sa Japan ko na lang bibilhan

si Kuya at tsaka sila Mommy.

“Mom, Dad, I’m home,” I announced as soon as I entered the house.

“You really can’t do something right, for fuck’s sake!”

My eyes widened when I heard my dad’s angry yell. Binitawan ko kaagad ang

paper bags na dala ko at tumakbo paakyat ng study room where I heard the

sound. I tried to open it but it was locked.

“Oh my god,” I felt like tearing up when I heard a broken glass inside.

“I am still your father! I am paying for your fucking law school tuition! You

don’t have the right to raise your fucking voice at me!”

“You are obliged to support your child. Don’t throw that shit against me,” I

heard my brother’s voice.

I covered my mouth when I heard a slap. I knocked on the door repeatedly,

asking them to open up.

“Dad? Open the door!” I was hitting it with my fist. “Open the door! Now!”

I stepped backwards when my brother opened the door and looked at me with

bloodshot eyes. Namumula ang pisngi niya at may sugat sa labi. My lips parted,

wanting to talk but I couldn’t find the right words to say.

“Just go to your room, Elyse,” seryosong sabi ni Kuya.

Nilagpasan ko siya at pumasok sa loob. I saw my dad holding onto his table,

breathing heavily. Hawak niya ang golf club niya sa isang kamay at mukhang

galit. May basag din na vase sa gilid.

“Why are you hurting him?!” I yelled so loud my voice echoed inside the room.

“Elyse,” Shan grabbed my arm and tried to pull me outside.

“Don’t hurt him!” I cried.

“Please, let’s just go,” Shan was already begging me.

Nagpahatak ako sa kanya palabas. Binuksan niya ang balcony at lumabas kami

roon para magpahangin. Umiiyak pa rin ako habang nakasandal si Kuya roon,

facing the other side. His jaw aggressively moved as he was trying to calm

himself.

“I’m fine,” he whispered.

“You’re not fine!” Pinunasan ko ang luha ko. “Why do you guys always fight for

fuck’s sake! Can you just stop?!”

“Listen, Eli,” he sighed and held both of my hands. “As long as he’s treating

you right, you don’t have to worry.. but the moment he does something else

that could hurt you or.. your mom, just tell me. I’ll get you out of that

fucking house. Do you hear me?”

“What are you saying?” I sobbed.

“Sumunod ka na lang, okay? If that happens before I can even get a job, don’t

worry. I’ll find a way to keep you away from that old man,” he looked so mad.

“He’s our dad,” I reminded him. “You should not say bad things about him.”

“He’s your dad,” he corrected. “I don’t consider him as my family anymore.”

I couldn’t understand him! Hindi ko alam kung saan ba talaga niya hinuhugot

ang galit niya. I felt like I just knew the surface but he just wouldn’t let

me dig deeper on the ground. Tumango na lang ako at hinatid na niya ‘ko sa

kwarto ko bago umalis.

Gumising ako nang madaling-araw para ihatid si Hiro sa airport. My brother

picked me up using Neil’s van. Lahat sila ay nasa loob na except Hiro. ‘Yung

iba, hindi makakasama sa paghatid dahil galing sa malayo.

Dumaan kami sa condo ni Hiro at sinundo siya sa lobby. Neil and Arman helped

him with his luggages. Hiro looked so stressed when he opened the shotgun seat

and sat beside my brother.

“What the fuck happened to your face?” Hiro’s brows furrowed.

“Old hag,” Shan rolled his eyes.

“Dude, he’s so fucked up,” Hiro shook his head.

“Uhm, excuse me, you’re talking about my dad,” sumingit ako sa gitna nilang

dalawa.

“Yeah, your dad’s fucked up,” Hiro chuckled.

“Annoying ka,” sumimangot ako at bumalik na sa inuupuan ko.

“Did you find her?” Ate Helen asked.

“No,” Hiro gave her a small smile. “I guess that’s it. She doesn’t really want

to be found.”

“Who?” Nagtatakang tanong ko kay Ate Ericka. “Sinong hinahanap niyo?”

“Wala, baby girl,” she laughed.

Kinuha ko ang phone ko at binasa ang text ni Sevi.

From: Sevi

bb nasa byahe na kami

I typed my reply.

To: Sevi

Me also! Update me mwa

It was another devastating moment to see Hiro go but it hurt less now since

wala na ‘kong hidden feelings for him. He hugged my brother and whispered

something on him before getting his bags.

“I’ll see you soon,” he gave us a small smile.

“Take care, okay?” Ate Helen was crying. “Don’t forget to eat healthy!”

“Take care,” he waved his hand for the last time before going inside the

airport.

Pagkauwi, natulog ako ulit since Sunday naman at walang class. I woke up

around lunch time so I went down to eat my lunch. Napatingin ako sa post-it

note na iniwan ni Mommy sa may plate ng food.

‘Emergency travel to Singapore.

I’m with your dad. Will be back tomorrow.

-Mom’Â

Nanlaki ang mata ko sa tuwa. Binilisan ko kaagad ang kain ko at tinext si

Sevi. Around 11 nang itext niya ‘ko na nakabalik na silang Manila pero tulog

ako kaya ngayon ko lang nabasa.

To: Sevi

Come over!! My parents left!!

From: Sevi

Huh

Sumimangot kaagad ako. Nakakainis naman siya! One month na siyang hindi

pumupunta sa bahay. Last na ‘yung sa first kiss namin, e! Maybe we can move a

little forward this time? I giggled.

To: Sevi

Pls it’s our monthsary today

From: Sevi

hmmm :)

To: Sevi

Pls we’ll just play a videogame

From: Sevi

scam ‘yan hahaha

Inis akong nag-type ulit.

To: Sevi

I want to talk about something.

From: Sevi

okay nakakakaba ka naman

Naligo kaagad ako at nag-ayos ng sarili. Nagsuot ako ng black shorts and a

grey tank top. Nagpabango rin ako at naglagay ng lip tint para mas maayos

akong tignan. Umupo ako sa couch, calling Ida.

[Yes?] Sagot niya kaagad. [What's our problem?]

"Sevi's coming over!" Excited na sabi ko.

[Omg!] Narinig kong sinara niya ang pinto, mukhang pumasok sa kwarto niya.

[Remember what I said! Lick his lips and suck it but not too much, okay?! And

then put your hands around his neck to pull him closer!]

"I'm so nervous," kinagat ko ang daliri ko. "Should I guide his hand upwards?"

[Ooh, freaky.] Ida teased. [Huwag muna! Take it slow! You guys haven't even

made out yet. Puro smack lang kayo. Gosh!]

"Okay. Take it slow," bulong ko. "We haven't even.. said our I love you's

yet."

[Omg, true ba?] Ida laughed. [Why don't you talk about it?]

"We will! Kaya pinapunta ko siya rit- Omg," napatayo kaagad ako nang marinig

ang doorbell. “He’s here na! Laters!”

Binaba ko ang tawag at tumakbo kaagad pababa ng hagdan para pagbuksan si Sevi.

He was just wearing a white shirt and a pair of black sweatshorts but he

looked so attractive. Gumilid ako para pumasok siya. He even double-checked if

my parents were inside.

“Anong pag-uusapan natin?” Tanong niya kaagad.

“Let’s talk inside my room,” I smiled at him.

“Sabi na, e! Budol ‘to!” Umakto siyang aalis na.

“Hey! I’m serious kasi! We need to talk about it but I want it to be private!”

Hinawakan ko ang braso niya para pigilan siya. He was obviously just being

playful.

“Ano nga ‘yon? Kinakabahan ako,” he held his chest. “Makikipag-break ka na ba?

Wag naman, oh.”

“Of course not!” Binatukan ko kaagad siya. “Just follow me!”

Umakyat ako sa hagdan at pinasunod siya hanggang sa loob ng kwarto ko.

Pagkapasok niya, sinara ko na ulit ang pinto at umupo sa kama ko.

“Sit here,” tinapik ko ang space sa tabi ko.

“Dito na lang ako,” umupo siya sa sofa.

“I said, sit here!” Sigaw ko.

Napatayo kaagad siya at tumatawang umupo sa tabi ko. He even checked how soft

the matress was, mukhang namangha pa.

“Anong pag-uusapan natin?” Tanong niya ulit. Mukhang kanina pa siya

nabobother.

“Give me a kiss first,” I pouted my lips playfully.

“Awit,” he laughed at me.

“Bahala ka, hindi ko sasabihin ‘yung problema ko,” I crossed my arms over my

chest.

He smiled before holding my face and giving me a soft kiss. Like what Ida

said, I put my arms around his neck to deepen our kiss. He groaned and moved

his lips to angle himself. I tried to move with him. I bit his lower lip and

sucked on it a little, which made him groan.

I moved closer and straddled his hips. Umatras siya sa kama at tinungkod ang

isang kamay niya sa likod para suportahan ang bigat niya habang ang isang

kamay ay nasa bewang ko. I kissed him again. He pushed his tongue inside me.

His hand went up a little from my waist, which made me go crazy.

“Anong pag-uusapan?” He whispered when he let me go.

I was breathing heavily, nakalimutan na kung ano ba talaga ang pag-uusapan

namin. Napatingin ulit ako sa kanya nang maalala.

“We.. Uh.. Haven’t said the three words yet,” I bit my lower lip, getting

embarrassed that I had to open it up.

“Three words?” Kumunot ang noo niya. “Anong three words? Resorts World

Manila?” He laughed.

“Ewan ko sa’yo!” Umayos na ‘ko ng tayo at umupo na lang sa sofa, nagtatampo na

sa kanya.

“Ano nga?” Naguguluhang tanong niya. “Three words? Uhm.. Go to hell?”

“Sebastian!” Inis na sabi ko. “Bwisit naman, e!”

Tumawa ulit siya, halatang pinagtitripan ako. I rolled my eyes and looked

down, getting more embarrassed now. I played with my hands and stared at the

floor.

“Elyse,” he called.

“What?!” I glared at him.

“I love you,” he smiled.

:)

14

“Can you repeat that?”

I blinked once. Twice. Thrice. Did I hear it right? Did he just say the ‘three

words’?! Or was I just hearing things?!

Tumayo ako at naglakad palapit sa kanya sa may kama para marinig ko siya nang

maayos. I stood in between his tighs and held on his shoulders. Nilagay niya

ang isang kamay sa bewang ko habang ang isa ay nakatungkod pa rin sa kama. His

veins were already showing on that hand which made me feel a lot of things.

“‘Yung ano?” Sevi teased.

“‘Yung sinabi mo kanina. Did I hear it right?” Gulat pa rin akong nakatingin

sa kanya.

“‘Yung ano nga?”

“I love you!” I specified.

“I love you too,” he smirked.

Inis ko siyang natulak sa balikat kaya bigla siyang bumagsak sa kama. Since he

was holding my waist, I lost my balance and fell on top of him. My eyes

widened when I realized our position.

“Elyse?” I heard my brother’s voice outside.

“Oh shit!” Agad akong tumayo at nataranta.

I was walking around my room, looking for a place to hide Sevi. Nagmamadali

kong binuksan ang walk-in closet ko at hinatak si Sevi papasok roon.

Naguguluhan pa siya sa’kin pero sumunod naman siya.

“Sino ‘yon?” Nagtatakang tanong niya.

“It’s my brother! Hide!” Tinulak ko siya papasok at sinara ang pinto.

Saktong-sakto bumukas ang pinto ko kaya tumalikod ako at yumuko sa may side

table, acting like I was doing something. I looked back at my brother, acting

like I was shocked that he was here. Parang hindi ko siya narinig kanina.

“Kuya!” I gave him an awkward smile. “Nandito ka pala! What brings you here?”

“Are you okay?” His brows furrowed when he saw me sweating. “Your mom informed

me that you’re going to be left alone in the house so I’m staying here until

tomorrow. I’ll leave around 5 AM, though. I need to go to school.”

“What?!” Nanlaki ang mata ko.

“I’ll just study in the living room. I’ll call you when dinner’s ready,” then

he closed the door.

I waited for a bit more before following him downstairs. Sumilip ako sa

hagdanan at nakita siyang naglapag ng makakapal na libro sa coffee table ng

living room na katabi ng pinto kung saan dapat lalabas si Sevi! I can’t sneak

him out now! God, mukhang hindi pa matutulog si Kuya, ah?! Ang dami niyang

readings!

Dahan-dahan akong bumaba at sinubukang buksan ang back door pero gumawa ‘yon

ng ingay kaya napalingon sa’kin si Kuya. Fuck naman! Why did it make a damn

sound?!

“Where are you going?” Tanong ni Kuya.

“Ah, I’m looking for my phone,” sinara ko kaagad ang back door at ngumiti sa

kanya.

“Yeah, you’re holding it, though,” he looked at my hand.

“Oh!” Tinaas ko ang kamay ko at tinignan ang hawak kong phone. “Right! Haha!

Silly me!”

Kumunot ang noo niya sa pagtataka kung bakit ganito ang inaakto ko pero

umiling na lang at binalik ang atensyon sa pagbabasa. I muttered a curse

before running upstairs. Pagkabukas ko ng kwarto ko, sinara ko kaagad at ni-

lock bago binuksan ang walk-in closet.

“We have a big problem,” I told him nervously.

I caught him looking at the big shelf where I put my bag collection. Naka-sort

‘yun by color. Minsan naman by brand. Depende sa mood. Katabi ng shelf na ‘yon

ay puro shoes naman. I had more bags than shoes so medyo mas maliit ang shelf

ng sapatos.

“I’m.. thinking of selling some of my bags so I can donate the money to.. Sam?

Diba may charity work kayo?” I bit my finger.

Gulat na napatingin sa’kin si Sevi bago binalik ang tingin sa shelf. May

limang empty space doon dahil binenta ni Mommy noong bumili ako ng bago.

“Sigurado ka ba?” Tanong niya sa’kin.

“Well, uh, yeah. Masisira lang ‘yan dito kung hindi ko ginagamit,” I looked at

the ones placed at the very bottom of the shelf. Those were the old ones.

“I’ll give you the money before my flight.”

“Ano na ‘yung big problem natin?” Umupo siya sa maliit na couch sa loob ng

walk-in closet.

“I think.. Uhm.. You’re staying here until midnight,” I gave him an awkward

smile.

“Ano?!” His brows furrowed. “Bakit?”

“My.. My brother’s downstairs. Nag-aaral siya sa living room so I can’t sneak

you out. He’ll leave around 5, though! We can wake up at 5 and then wait for

him to leave so you can go before my parents arrive,” mabilis na

pagpapaliwanag ko. “Lunch time pa naman ang flight nila Mommy pabalik!”

“Wala akong damit, oy,” napakamot si Sevi sa ulo niya.

“I’ll take care of it!” I felt so bad. Pumunta siya rito, not expecting that

he will be forced to stay in the whole night. “But.. isn’t that great?!”

“Anong great doon?” Mukhang problemado pa siya.

“We’ll be spending our first night together!” I tried to look at the brighter

side.

“Oo nga. Anong great doon?” He covered his face in frustration.

“Why?” I pouted. “Don’t you want to sleep with me?”

“Hindi naman, pero..” He looked at me for a moment and sighed when he saw my

sad face. “Okay. Okay, sige. Panalo ka na.”

Tumalon ako sa tuwa at lumabas na ng walk-in closet para tawagan si Kuya Roel.

I asked him to buy things for Sevi like clothes and some essentials. I also

asked him to put it in a paper bag para madaling itago kay Kuya. I’ll just say

na I bought it for myself.

“Elyse, pwedeng pakuha rin ng reviewer ko kamo sa bahay?” Singit ni Sevi. “May

finals pa ‘ko bukas.”

“Oh, okay,” tinawagan ko ulit si Kuya Roel.

“Ma,” rinig kong sagot ni Sevi sa tawag. “Hindi ako makakauwi ngayon, e. May

ano.. May review kami para sa finals bukas. Pakisabi kay Steven bago ka

umalis, may kukuha ng reviewer ko dyan. Paki-abot na lang ‘yung backpack kong

black.”

Oh no, he has finals tomorrow. Ngumuso ako at umupo sa kama ko, hinihintay

siyang matapos makipag-usap sa Mama niya. Okay, Elyse. Later, huwag mo siyang

guguluhin dahil mag-aaral siya. I did this to him so I should stay quiet or

else he will fail.

Lumabas siya ng walk-in closet at umupo sa couch. Tumabi ako sa kanya at

hinawakan ang kamay niya.

“I’m sorry,” I pouted. “I didn’t know-”

“Okay lang,” he chuckled and kissed my forehead.

“Are you sure it’s okay? Promise, mamaya, hindi kita guguluhin. You can study.

I can stay inside my closet all day so you can study in peace,” I felt like

tearing up because of guilt.

He smiled and held my face to give me a soft kiss. I automatically closed my

eyes and parted my lips to welcome him. His hand went from my cheek down to

the side of my neck, holding me in place. He sucked my lower lip and pushed

his tongue inside me. I held on his arm for support.

Nang bitawan niya ‘ko, hinihingal na ‘ko.

“ML lang ako,” paalam niya.

Napasimangot kaagad ako at inirapan siya. Kinuha ko na lang ang phone ko at

inabala ang sarili ko sa social media habang abala siya sa page-ML niya. May

kausap pa siya sa earphones niya.

“Amp! Mid nga diba? Anong ginagawa mo dyan?” Sevi looked so frustrated.

“Language,” I rolled my eyes.

“Bobo naman nung isang kakampi. Sino ba ‘yon? Hoy Luna, pakisabi nga bobo

siya. Mukhang hindi niya alam, e. Hoy, amp, kill steal! Siraulo!”

Lumingon kaagad ako sa kanya habang nakaupo ako sa vanity chair ko, practicing

my make-up.Â Luna, huh? ML buddies.

Umirap ako at pinagpatuloy ang pagmemake-up sa sarili ko. Nang matapos ako,

saktong natapos na rin si Sevi sa laro niya.

“Hey you, come here,” sinenyasan ko si Sevi na umupo sa vanity chair ko.

“Huh? Bakit?” Pinatay niya ang phone niya at sumunod sa’kin.

Binuksan ko ulit ang ilaw ng vanity mirror at nilapag ang mga make-up ko sa

harapan niya. Tinignan niya ‘yon, nagtataka. Kinuha niya pa ang isang brush at

sinubok sa pisngi niya para malaman kung anong feeling.

“I’ll practice on you,” hinarap ko siya sa’kin at kinuha ang cleanser.

“Practice ng ano?” He did not have any clue.

“Make-up! I’m trying a new look.”

He was about to protest but I already wiped the cotton pad on his face.

Napapikit siya kaagad at napakunot ang noo habang pinupunasan ko ang mukha

niya. I giggled and made him wear my pink hairband na may ribbon sa taas.

“Kasya ba ‘yan sa’kin?” Nagtatakang tanong niya.

“Just wear it!”

Nang isuot niya, tinawanan ko kaagad ang itsura niya. I took a picture of him

wearing that so I could put it as my home screen. He looked so cute and

innocent.

“Pwe, ano ba ‘yan,” reklamo niya habang dinadampian ko ng blender ang taas ng

lips niya. “Hoy, wag mong diinan sa mata ko! Baka mabulag ako nyan!”

“I’m sorry,” tumatawa pa rin ako habang inaayos ang foundation sa kanya. I had

a darker shade with me so ‘yun ang ginamit ko sa kanya. “There, there.

Concealer na lang. Wait.”

Kukuhanin ko na sana ang concealer kaso tumawag si Kuya Roel. Dali-dali akong

bumaba at kinuha ang paper bag mula sa kanya. Lumingon si Kuya saglit pero

binalik din ang mata sa pagbabasa. I smiled and ran upstairs again.

I saw Sevi looking at himself in the mirror. Sinara ko ang pinto at ni-lock

‘yon bago nag-alcohol.

“Game na,” kinuha ko ang concealer at pinaharap ulit siya sa’kin. “Look up.”

He pursed his lips and looked up. I was smiling the whole time! Tahimik lang

siya at sinusunod lahat ng sinasabi ko. Nakakatawa siya tignan.

“Close your eyes. What’s your favorite color?” Kinuha ko ang eyeshadow palette

ko.

“Grey,” sagot niya.

“Ew, that’s so basic,” I rolled my eyes.

“Sige. Neon pink,” he chuckled.

Tumawa ako at kinuha ang brush ko. I decided to give him a ‘fall’ look. Habang

nilalagyan ko siya ng eyeshadow, nakapikit lang siya at naghihintay.

“Baka makatulog ako rito, ah,” reklamo niya ulit.

“Don’t sleep, stupid,” I chuckled.

“Inaantok na ‘ko, babe,” he sighed.

“Eh! Kaunti na lang! Just wait!”

“Kanina pa ‘yung ‘kaunti’ na ‘yan, ah.”

Kinuha ko na ang eyeliner at nilagyan siya ng wing. I messed it up a little so

I had to re-do it. Halatang naiinip na siya pero sinusubukan pa ring habaan

ang pasensya niya.

“Look up,” I told him, holding my pencil eyeliner.

Tumingin naman siya sa taas kaya nilagyan ko siya ng eyeliner sa baba ng eyes

niya.

“Hoy, ano ba ‘yan, nakakaiyak naman ‘yan. Sibuyas ba ‘yan? Puta, ang sakit sa

mata,” napapikit siya ulit, hindi pa nga ako tapos!

“Babe, sige na, dali na. Malapit na matapos, please,” pagmamakaawa ko. “Look

up.”

He sighed heavily but still looked up even though he was tearing up a bit.

Tinapos ko na lang kaagad para hindi na siya maluha. Kinuha ko ang pangkilay

ko at hinawakan ang baba niya para makita siya nang maayos.

“Aahitin mo ba kilay ko? Wag naman,” natakot kaagad siya.

“No, silly,” I giggled while I was brushing his thick eyebrows. “I like your

brows!” Maarteng sabi ko.

“Omg, thanks! It’s organic,” he mocked my voice.

“Bwisit ka,” I laughed. “You’re so epal.”

Pagkatapos sa kilay niya, I started putting contour on his face. I asked him

to do the fish face and laughed when he really did it.

“Pinagtitripan mo lang ata ako, e,” nagtampo na siya.

“No, ah!”

I stayed quiet while I was brushing on his sharp jawline. Nakatagilid nang

kaunti ang mukha niya para makita ko ang jawline niya. It could probably cut

my finger or something.

“Ano ‘yan?” Tanong niya nang kumuha ako ng highlighter stick.

“Highlighter,” nilapag ko saglit sa table para maghanap ng brush.

Kinuha niya ang highlighter at humarap sa salamin, smiling. My brows furrowed

and looked back at him.

“Hey guys, welcome back to my channel,” he mocked.

“What the hell,” I shook my head.

“So for today’s video, I’ll be using this highlighter on the shade..” He

flipped the stick so he could see the shade.

“Shut up,” inagaw ko kaagad ang highlighter sa kanya at pinaharap siya sa’kin

para malagay ko sa mukha niya.

I did my final touch and sprayed on his face without warning, which made him

sneeze. Kinuha ko ang phone ko so I could take a picture of him and his look.

“Done! Do you like it?” Hinarap ko siya sa salamin, tuwang tuwa.

“Ganda ko naman,” he pointed at his face in the mirror. “Liligawan ko ‘to.”

“Don’t. I’ll get jealous.”

After taking pictures, I helped him take the makeup off using my cleansing

wipes. Binura ko na rin ‘yung sa akin.

Nakaupo na siya sa sahig at nakalapag ang mga reviewer sa coffee table ko.

Nag-aaral na siya kaya nanahimik na lang ako sa kama, scrolling through my

feed. I was so bored again but I couldn’t do anything since nag-aaral si Sevi.

Lumabas na lang muna ako ng kwarto at bumaba para kumuha ng snacks for us. My

brother was still studying in the living room. He massaged his head in

frustration. Poor him.

Kumuha ako ng water, chocolates, chips, and juice. Bago ako umakyat, nilapag

ko muna ang glass of water sa table ni Kuya, pati ilang chocolates. He looked

at me and gave me a small smile.

“Study well, Attorney,” I smiled before going upstairs.

Sinara ko ang pinto at nilock ulit bago ilapag ang mga kinuha kong pagkain sa

may side table. Baka kasi matapon sa reviewers ni Sevi. I didn’t want to

stress him out.

“Take a break, Engineer,” umupo ako sa couch.

Sinara niya ang notebook niya at umupo sa tabi ko para magpahinga. I opened a

chocolate bar for him and also offered him water. Kinuha niya naman ‘yon at

kumain habang nakasandal sa couch.

“Is it hard?” I curiously looked at his reviewers. When I saw numbers, I

immediately placed it back on the table. “Damn, nevermind.”

“Sakto lang,” sagot niya naman.

I looked at some of his sketches. He was really good at it. I can’t even draw

a damn sheep! I also can’t make a perfect circle without using a bottle cap as

a guide.

“Mad respect, bro. I would probably fail that program,” I laughed.

He went back to studying after eating kaya nagsuot na lang ako ng earpods at

nanood ng Netflix so I wouldn’t disturb him. Gabi na nang tawagin ako ni Kuya

para sa dinner so iniwan ko muna si Sevi para bumaba.

“I’ll eat in my room na lang, Kuya. You can continue studying. Hindi mo ‘ko

kailangan samahan sa table,” I told him.

“Sure ka?” His brows furrowed.

“Yeah, no worries!” I said casually.

Dali-dali akong kumuha ng tray at nilagay ang plato ko roon. Diet ako so ‘yung

karamihan sa kinuha ko ay mapupunta kay Sevi. I smiled at my brother before

walking upstairs. Good thing he didn’t ask about the amount of food I placed

on my tray.

“Dinner,” nilapag ko ang tray sa coffee table pagkatapos i-lock ulit ang

pinto.

“Malapit na ‘ko matapos. Wait lang,” tumawad pa siya.

I waited for him to finish studying and silently celebrated when he closed his

notebook and fixed his things. Yey, tapos na siya! We can finally have time

together!

After eating together, I went downstairs again to put the tray back. Busy pa

rin si Kuya at wala ata talaga siyang balak matulog. He even got himself a

coffee.

Pagkaakyat ko, tinitignan na ni Sevi ang laman ng malaking paper bag. Kumuha

ako ng extra towel sa cabinet ko at inabot sa kanya so he could take a shower.

“Ikaw na muna,” sabi niya sa’kin.

“Okay,” kinuha ko ang towel ko at ‘yung bathrobe bago ako pumasok ng bathroom.

I showered for 20 minutes and also brushed my teeth. I made sure everything

was clean before I stepped outside in my bathrobe. Sevi looked at me for a

second and stood up. Walang pasabi niya ‘kong nilagpasan at pumasok na sa

banyo para maligo.

I pouted and sat on my vanity chair to blowdry my hair. Napatigil lang ako

nang matapos na mag-shower si Sevi at lumabas siyang may towel sa balikat. He

was already wearing a pair of black Adidas sweatpants and a white shirt that

was perfect for his body. Basa pa ang buhok niya kaya pinapatuyo niya gamit

ang towel.

“You want me to blowdry your hair?” I offered.

Tumango na lang siya at umupo sa vanity chair. Tumayo ako sa likod niya at

pinatuyo ang buhok niya gamit ang blower. His hair was so soft!

“Hindi ka pa ba magbibihis?” He looked at me through the mirror.

“After this,” sagot ko.

“Ako na rito. Magbihis ka na,” he urged me.

Sumimangot ako at tinalikuran na siya para pumasok sa walk-in closet ko. I

decided to wear a black camisole and pink dolphin shorts. Pagkalabas ko,

nakaupo na si Sevi sa sofa at nagM-ML nanaman. He glanced at me for a second

and smiled when he saw me.

I rolled my eyes and fixed the comforter on my bed. Binaba ko ‘yon at inayos

din ang mga unan bago ako umupo.

“Play that game here,” I tapped the space on the bed. “Beside me.”

Dahil distracted siya, sumunod kaagad siya. Umupo siya sa kabilang side ng

kama at sumandal sa headboard, still on his phone.

I sighed heavily and made sure he would hear it. Napalingon kaagad siya sa’kin

at napaawang ang labi. I sighed again while looking at the wall.

He immediately turned his phone off and looked at me.

“Hindi na,” he gave me an apologetic smile.

“Let’s sleep. Nag-alarm na ‘ko,” humiga ako sa kama at humarap sa kanya.

Humiga rin siya pero nakatingin lang siya sa kisame, malalim ang iniisip. He

looked really nervous and uncomfortable. Umupo na lang tuloy ako sa kama at

humarap sa kanya.

“Kala ko matutulog na?” He raised a brow.

“I’m not sleepy yet,” I bit my lower lip. “I need a kiss.”

“Lord,” he whispered.

I leaned on him and gave him a peck. Wala siyang reaction. Tinignan niya lang

ako at umayos ng upo para isandal ang likod sa headboard. I crawled towards

him and straddled his hips again. He looked away like he was in pain.

“Why can’t you look at me?”

“Eli, hindi nakakatuwa,” he sighed.

“What?” Kumunot ang noo ko. “I just want a kiss!”

He faced me and gave me a short kiss before letting me go but it wasn’t enough

for me. I went closer and closed my eyes to kiss him. I put both of my hands

on his shoulders and sucked on his lower lip.

He groaned and put his hand at the back of my head to deepen the kiss. His

other hand travelled to my waist, pulling me closer to him. I opened my mouth

and welcomed his tongue inside. He tasted every corner of me before sucking on

my lip again.

I stopped when I felt something on his sweatpants. He sighed and looked up,

closing his eyes in frustration.

“Uhm,” I was about to touch it but he caught my hand.

“Tulog na tayo,” seryosong sabi niya.

“You’re.. Uhm..” I bit my finger and looked down on his crotch. “You’re..”

“Hard,” he finished my sentence.

“Yeah,” I looked at him with parted lips. I was so shocked! Who knew I could..

do that?! I never thought about it! “What do we do with that?”

“Ano?” Kumunot ang noo niya. “Wala. Matulog ka na.”

Instead of sleeping, I leaned again and gave him a kiss. He was so

unresponsive at first but when I pushed my tongue inside him, he gave in. He

held the back of my head and angled his face so he could kiss me harder.

His hand went from my waist down to caress my thigh. I stopped kissing him for

a few seconds to breathe. He waited and looked down on our position before I

kissed him again. I sighed through the kiss when his hand went from my waist

up to my chest. I felt something foreign because of his touch!

Inalis niya kaagad ang kamay niya at binaba sa bewang ko so the foreign

feeling faded immediately. I stopped kissing him and looked down on my chest.

I was so conscious. Maybe he stopped touching my chest because it was.. not..

large?

“Bakit?” He asked.

“Uhm, wala,” I felt embarrassed.

His brows furrowed while he was staring at me, trying to figure out why I

suddenly stopped. My face heated in embarrassment. Oh my gosh.

“Bakit?” He was not convinced. “Ayaw mo ba? I’m sorry-”

“No!” Tanggi ko kaagad. “I’m just..”

“Ano?” He licked his lower lip and raised his brow.

“My.. b-boobs.. are..”

Nakatingin lang siya sa’kin, naguguluhan sa gusto kong sabihin. After a

moment, his lips parted and a smile slowly formed his lips. Sumimangot ako

nang marinig siyang tumawa. Anong nakakatawa?!

“Hindi naman, ah,” he was still laughing.

“Ewan ko sa’yo! Don’t laugh!” I covered his mouth.

He stopped laughing but there was still humor in his eyes. Nang tanggalin ko

ang kamay ko sa labi niya, hinatak niya ‘ko para yakapin. Sinandal ko ang ulo

ko sa balikat niya at binaon ang mukha ko sa leeg niya, inhaling his manly

scent.

“Cute,” he laughed.

“Stop!” Inis na reklamo ko.

“Wala naman akong pakialam doon, Eli.”

“Liar,” I whispered.

“Oo nga,” he still tried to convince me. “Promise. Hindi mo naman kailangan

ng.. ano.. Hahahaha!”

Inis ko siyang hinampas sa dibdib nang tumawa ulit siya.

“Matulog na lang tayo,” he pushed me lightly.

Tumango ako at bumalik na sa pagkakahiga. I hugged him and put my head on the

side of his chest before I fell asleep. My alarm went off at exactly 5 AM kaya

sabay kaming nagising. He was still sleepy when he fixed his things.

Dahan-dahan akong lumabas ng kwarto at bumaba ng hagdan. Nakita ko si Kuya na

nag-aayos na ng gamit niya. Nang lumabas siya, sumilip ako sa bintana.

Pinanood ko siyang mag-drive paalis.

I waited 10 minutes more just to see if he will come back but he did not so umakyat na ‘ko at hinatak si Sevi pababa ng hagdan. I opened the back door just to be safe. Hindi ko na pwedeng gisingin si Kuya Roel dahil baka isumbong niya na ‘ko kay Daddy so hinatid ko na lang si Sevi hanggang sa gate. May tricycle naman malapit.

“Bye,” I waved at him before going back inside.

It was peaceful the whole week until term break. Flight na namin bukas kaya I decided to pay a visit in Sevi’s house so I could give my gifts. He told me that we’ll go after his last exam so naghintay ako sa labas ng building nila. I was just there, holding a paper bag. I was wearing a simple shirt and leggings.

Napatayo ako nang makitang may naglalabasan nang studyante sa building. I crossed the road and waited near the entrance, looking around. The engineering students were talking about the exam. Wala akong maintindihan. They were forming circles, discussing the answers and debating.

“Sevi!” I called when I saw him with two of his blockmates. They were discussing something, too, but stopped when he looked at me.

He smiled and tapped his blockmate’s shoulder before walking towards me in his

engineering uniform. I gave him a tight hug and congratulated him for

finishing the exams.

“Ano ba ‘yan! Jowa agad! Turo mo muna sa’min ‘yung last number, master!” Tawag

ng blockmate niya.

“Hindi ko rin alam ‘yon! Hinulaan ko lang!” Sevi laughed.

“Puta, bagsak nanaman ata ako, ah!” Reklamo nung isa.

“Wag ganoon! Graduating, e!” Sevi laughed at his blockmate before looking at

me again. “Tara na.”

Umakbay siya sa’kin at lumabas kami ng campus para mag-abang ng jeep. I

haven’t rode a jeepney yet but of course I did not tell him that. Pagkasakay

namin, umupo ako sa tabi niya at hinawakan niya ang kamay ko.

“Init,” sabi niya habang pinupunasan ang pawis niya gamit ang panyo niya.

Kinuha ko rin ang panyo ko at pinunasan ang pawis ko sa noo. I took my hairtie

out so I could put my hair on a ponytail. It was so hot I was sweating so

hard. It was around 1 PM pa naman.

“How much?” Bulong ko sa kanya.

“Wag na, ako na,” he chuckled and looked for his wallet inside his bag.

Kumuha siya ng bente at pinaabot sa nasa tabi ko. I did not understand what he

said but I think he told the driver the location and also informed him that we

were students. For the.. discount? I guess.

Umusog ako palapit kay Sevi nang ilagay ng lalaki sa tabi ko ang kamay niya sa

side ng upuan, touching my thigh a little. Sevi looked at me when he noticed

that I was pushing him.

“Bakit?” Tanong niya.

“Nothing,” I looked away.

My brows furrowed when I felt the guy’s hand brushing my thigh again. Umusog

ulit ako hanggang sa masiksik na si Sevi sa dulo ng jeep, near the door. He

looked at me again before looking down at my thigh. His brows furrowed and

sighed heavily.

“Palit nga tayo,” he told me when the jeepney stopped.

Tumango ako at umusog sa pwesto niya. Siya naman ang umupo sa pwesto ko. I saw

him staring at the guy beside me earlier.

“Putangina ka, wala kang magawa?” My eyes widened when Sevi suddenly talked to

the guy.

“Hey,” I grabbed his arm.

Oh my god, ganito ba everyday sa jeep? I literally had no idea! Normal ba ‘to?

‘Yung away?

The guy suddenly stood up to leave the jeep, feeling guilty. I gasped when

Sevi grabbed him on the sleeve of his shirt and pulled him back.

“Hey, stop na,” I tried to tell Sevi.

“Ano, tatakas ka? Gago ka pala, e,” Sevi’s jaw moved aggressively. He was so

mad!

“Sorry po, sorry po,” the guy wanted to cry.

“Anong sorry? Putangina mo, sasapakin kita.”

Oh my god. Everyone was already looking. Some were already calling the police!

When the jeepney stopped again, Sevi literally dragged the guy down the jeep

kaya sumunod ako. He went inside a police station and pushed the guy inside.

Wow, what a great experience in that jeepney. I did not want any trouble

anymore but I think it was just right to report the guy. He might do it to

other women, so I went through the process before the police let us go.

“I’m okay,” I assured Sevi while we were walking.

“Badtrip,” he sighed.

Lumagpas ata kami dahil doon kaya naglakad kami papunta sa street nila, and

then tumawid kami ng overpass. I was just following him until we stopped in

front of their house. It was not big but it wasn’t small either. Just the

right size for their family.

“Hoy, saan ka galing?” Tanong niya kaagad sa teenager na papasok pa lang ng

gate.

“Sa school!” The guy answered, panicking a little. He was wearing a highschool

uniform. He was tall, too! Nice genes.

“Cutting ka nanaman, Steven. Isusumbong kita kay Mama,” turo ni Sevi sa kanya.

“Hindi ako cutting, Kuya! May meeting ‘yung teachers!” Pagdadahilan ng kapatid

niya.

Inaya ako ni Sevi papasok kaya sumunod ako sa kanya. I took my shoes off and

he gave me slippers that I could use inside. I saw Sofia watching cartoons in

the living room. ‘Yung Mama niya, nasa kusina.

“Ma, si Elyse, nandito,” paalam niya.

“Elyse! Nako jusko, pasensya ka na. Hindi pa ‘ko tapos magluto!” She wiped her

hands using the towel.

“Magmano ka,” Sevi whispered on me.

“Oh, right!” I panicked. “Good noon po.”

Nagmano ako at inakbayan ako ni Sevi para dalhin ulit sa living room. I guess

walang work Mommy niya today because my dad’s out of town with his friends.

Break niya rin siguro ‘yung days na wala kami dahil nasa Japan. Good for her.

“‘Yung.. Uh.. Papa mo?” I curiously asked.

Napatingin si Steven sa’kin saglit pero umiwas din nang tignan siya ni Sevi.

“Wala. Hiwalay na sila,” maikling sagot niya. “Hindi ko na alam kung saan

napunta.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I whispered. “I didn’t know.”

“Engineer din si Papa,” singit ni Steven.

“Hoy, tinanong ka ba? Gawin mo assignment mo,” pambabara ni Sevi.

“Kaya siya nag engineer!” Sigaw ulit ni Steven at tumakbo bago pa siya mahuli

ni Sevi.

:)

15

“You chose engineering because of your dad?”

Nakaupo kami sa may terrace ng bahay nila habang hinihintay ang food. He didn’t want to stay inside because his brother kept on talking about their dad. It was actually funny. Ang bully niyang Kuya sa kapatid niya but I guess that was just how their sibling relationship worked.

“Oo. Sinasama niya ‘ko sa site palagi,” Sevi shrugged like it was not a big deal for him. “Role model ko siya, ganoon, pero wala, e. Naghiwalay sila, e.”

“The reason? If you don’t mind,” I bit my lower lip.

“Hindi raw sila.. compatible,” Sevi chuckled. “Ilang taon silang nagkasama. May tatlo silang anak tapos saka lang nila marerealize na hindi sila compatible? Parang tanga.”

“But did they end in good terms?” Tanong ko ulit.

“Oo ata,” Sevi looked away. “Tinulungan pa siya ni Mama mag-impake, e. Hinatid ko pa sa bus station tatay ko tapos tinulungan ko pa siya sa mga bagahe niya. Kakapasa ko lang ng USTET non, e. Bad vibes amp.”

“Where is he now?”

“Probinsya. Hindi ko alam. O baka nasa Cebu. Wala naman siyang sinabi sa’kin,”

he shrugged. “Kapag kami nagkita sa site, hi na lang siguro. Hahaha!”

“You’re not mad?” Maingat na tanong ko. I didn’t want him to get sensitive

about the topic.

“Nakakagalit lang na.. Kaya niyang iwan mga anak niya nang ganoon. Hindi ako

nagagalit para sa’kin kasi kaya ko ang sarili ko. Wala akong tuition at

gagraduate na ‘ko pero si Steven, magco-college ‘yan. Si Sofia, malapit na

mag-aral. Hindi naman kaya ni Mama mag-isa. Ang daming binabayaran, e. Buti na

lang gagraduate na ‘ko. Ako na magpapaaral sa dalawa kung pwede.”

Wow, pakiramdam ko mas nakikilala ko pa siya kapag nagsasalita siya tungkol sa

pamilya niya. He was the first born. Panganay siya kaya siguro pakiramdam niya

responsibilidad niya ang buong family since he was the next man next to his

dad. Because his dad left, he was forced to carry the responsibilities.

Well, at least he had a nice relationship with his dad, right? It reminded me

of my brother, Shan. Kahit hindi sila in good terms ni Daddy, pakiramdam niya

pa rin na responsibilidad niya ‘ko at si Mommy kapag may nangyaring masama

sa’min just like what he said last time. Ganoon ba talaga kapag panganay?

“Kuya, kakain na raw,” lumabas si Steven na naka-sando na lang at tinanggal na

ang polo na uniform. “Girlfriend mo ba siya?”

“De, girlfriend mo,” pambabara ulit ni Sevi.

“Ulol, Kuya!” Inismiran siya ng kapatid niya.

“Ma, nagmumura!” Sumbong ni Sevi. “Bastos ng bunganga, oh!”

“Steven! Jusko ha! Umupo na kayo rito!” I heard his mom’s voice inside the

house.

Sevi and I went inside to eat lunch with his family. His mom was looking at me

in awe like she adored me so much. I just gave her a smile while I was eating.

“Sorry, ah. Napapatingin ako sa’yo. Hindi kasi ako sanay na may girlfriend si

Sevi,” his mom laughed.

“Ma, ang epal,” Sevi rolled his eyes.

“Ngayon ka lang kasi nagdala ng girlfriend. I mean, maraming babae pero ito

lang ang pinakilala mo bilang girl-”

“Ma!” Sevi stopped eating.

“M-maraming.. babae?” I stuttered.

Mabilis akong tumingin kay Sevi to glare at him. He shook his head and tried

to deny so hard but he couldn’t talk. Mas sumingkit lang ang mata ko sa kanya.

Maraming babae, huh?! Then give me a damn list! I will text him those names

every night so it would haunt him!

“Si Ate Luna,” singit ni Steven habang kumakain.

“Ikaw, manahimik ka. Sasandukin kita,” pagbabanta ni Sevi sa kanya.

Ate Luna, huh?!

Okay, I get it. They were close. Like, really really really close so

understood na close din si Luna sa family niya but I just can’t help it!

Nakakapangselos! He liked her before and he even introduced her to his family.

Sinong hindi maiinggit doon?

“Hindi lang si Luna,” tanggi kaagad ni Sevi.

“Oo, Elyse. Sila Kierra rin.. Sila Sam, ganyan. Pumupunta sila rito para

kumain dahil madalas nagtitipid. Malapit lang kasi ‘to sa school kaya ganoon,”

Mama niya na ang nagpaliwanag para sa kanya.

“Okay,” I just nodded so we wouldn’t talk about it anymore.

I was quiet while we were eating lunch. Nang matapos, kinuha ko ang paper bag

ko para ibigay ang gifts ko for them. His mom was so happy upon receiving the

designer perfume I got her. I just thought that giving perfume as a gift was

the safest.

“Naku, thank you, Elyse, ah,” his mom loved it.

“Advance Merry Christmas po,” I greeted shyly.

“Thank you, Ate,” tuwang tuwang sabi rin ni Steven.

Sofia was busy playing with the dolls but Sevi forced her to thank me. She

giggled and gave me a cute hug. Nagpaalam ang Mama ni Sevi na mamamalengke

kaya naiwan kami sa bahay nila. It was so awkward. His brother kept on looking

at me like I was a different species.

“Tulog na si Sof,” bumaba si Sevi sa living room pagkatapos buhatin si Sofia

sa kwarto. “Ikaw? Tapos mo na ba ‘yan?”

“Hindi ko nga gets,” sumimangot si Steven habang hawak ang ballpen.

“Patingin nga,” kinuha ni Sevi ang notebook at kumunot ang noo nang makita ang

problem doon. “Ang dali nyan. Calculus. Basic lang ‘yan. Hindi ka kasi

nakikinig. Puro ka cutting.”

“Hindi nga ‘ko nag-cutting!” I felt like Steven wanted to bang his head

against the wall. He looked so frustrated.

“Elyse, wait lang, ah,” lumingon sa’kin si Sevi bago binalik ang tingin sa

kapatid niya. “Makinig kang siraulo ka.”

I was smiling the whole time he was trying to teach his brother Calculus.

Nakikinig naman sa kanya si Steven pero paminsan-minsan, nagzozone out bigla

kaya pinipitik ni Sevi ang noo. I giggled. They looked so adorable.

“O, paano mo nakuha ‘yan? Ano, binulong sa’yo ng santo?” Sevi’s brows

furrowed.

“Hindi! Kasi diba one fourth tapos naka-square,” Steven pointed at his

notebook.

“O, anong square noon?” Tumaas ang kilay ni Sevi. “Square hindi square root!”

Napakamot lalo ng ulo si Steven. “Hindi na ‘ko mag e-engineer! Ayoko na ng

math!”

“Oo, tama. Mag-ML ka na lang tutal mas pinagtutuonan mo ‘yon ng pansin,”

pinagalitan nanaman siya ni Sevi. “Ano nga rank mo? Ah, grandmaster pa rin.

Hindi ka na umusad. Partida nagcucutting ka pa para mag ML, ah.”

“Yabang mo!”

When they finished with their little tutoring session, Steven went upstairs to

take a shower so I was left again with Sevi in the living room. Isa-isa niyang

binuksan ang butones ng uniform niyang white polo at hinubad ‘yon dahil sa

init. He was left in his white shirt.

“Kiss,” ngumuso ako.

“Huh? Dito?” Conscious na lumingon si Sevi sa paligid.

“Isa lang,” I whispered.

Sevi sighed before giving me a soft kiss. Humiwalay na rin siya pagkatapos at

tumingin sa paligid. He looked so nervous.

“Kuya!” Bumaba si Steven.

“Puta!” Nagulat si Sevi at napahawak sa dibdib niya.

“Luh,” Steven laughed. “Pahiram ako ng laptop, ah! May gagawin akong project.”

Sevi sighed and went upstairs to find the laptop. He also gestured me to

follow him kaya tumayo rin ako at umakyat. There were four rooms upstairs at

kita kaagad siya pagkaakyat. Sevi opened the brown door and went inside. Si

Steven, naghintay lang sa labas.

“Is this your room?” I asked before going inside.

“Oo,” sagot niya naman habang may kinukuha sa cabinet.

I walked inside and looked around. It was not small but it wasn’t that big either. It was the perfect size for a double bed. May itim na cabinet sa may gilid and then may bola ng basketball sa sahig. He also had a grey bean bag on the floor and a full-length mirror on the other side of the wall. May trophies din na naka-display sa shelf. Nandoon din ‘yung books niya and other school stuff.

I was expecting to see laundry all over the floor but his room really looked clean. I was probably just stereotyping inside my head.

“Oh,” inabot ni Sevi ang laptop sa kapatid.

“Thanks!”

Sinara na ni Sevi ang pinto at lumingon sa’kin. I smiled and sat on his bed like it was mine. It was soft, too! Mukhang mas mahaba ang kama niya kaysa sa’kin dahil mas matangkad siya.

“Are these your works?” Tumayo ako ulit at inabot ang mga papel sa shelf niya.

“Hindi ko alam. Basta papel,” Sevi chuckled and sat down on the bed.

Inisa-isa kong tignan ang papers. May mga sketches and then scratch papers,

drawings, exams. Napatigil ako nang tignan ang scores niya sa quizzes and major exams.

“Wow, you score well,” pinakita ko sa kanya ang exams. Nagre-range ‘yon from pasang-awa scores to almost perfect scores. Hindi ko na rin alam sa kanya kung paano ‘yon.

“Basta pasado! Okay na ‘yon,” kinuha niya ang mga papel, nahihiya na.

I sat beside him on the bed kaya umusog siya para malayo sa’kin. He was treating me like I had a disease! Sumimangot ako at hinawakan ang kamay niya para hatakin siya ulit palapit sa’kin.

I reached for his face and leaned so I could give him a kiss. He wasn’t responding at first but when I went closer to him and touched his chest, he started kissing back. He held the side of my neck and angled my face so he could kiss me better. He pushed his tongue inside me and I sucked on it. I wasn’t sure if I was doing it right but I couldn’t think properly when he was kissing me.

He stopped kissing me and stood up. Napatingin kaagad ako sa kanya nang masama, disappointed by his sudden move.

“Lolock ko lang,” he walked towards the door.

I also stood up and followed him. Pagkalock niya, gulat siyang lumingon sa'kin

dahil nasa harapan na niya 'ko. I tiptoed and put my arm around his neck so I

could kiss him again. He encircled his arms on my waist and kissed me back.

I held on him tightly when his hand went up to my chest and massaged my mound

through my clothing. I moaned on his mouth until his kisses covered the

sounds. He sucked on my lip and pushed his tongue again inside me while

touching my chest.

Pinagbaliktad niya ang posisyon namin at sinandal niya 'ko sa pinto while his

hand was still on my chest. I bit my lower lip when he started kissing my

neck. I held on his hair and looked up to give him more access. His hand went

inside my shirt and touched my chest through my brassier which surprised me.

"D-do I take my shirt off?" I asked.

He stopped and stared at me for a moment before laughing. Gosh, I ruined the

mood, didn't I?! I sighed heavily when he suddenly let go of me and sat down

again on his bed.

“Ako dapat magtatanggal pero.. Ewan ko. Kung gusto mo,” he still answered

properly, pero tumatawa!

“I hate you,” hiyang hiya akong humiga sa kama niya at tinakpan ang mukha ko.

“Bakit? Okay lang ‘yon,” he held my hand but I could still hear his laugh

behind his comforting words. “Nakakatawa ka pero cute naman kaya okay lang.”

“So epal,” I rolled my eyes.

We went downstairs after that because we heard his mom’s call outside the

gate. Sevi opened the door for her and acted like nothing happened inside his

bedroom. Kinailangan ko na ring umuwi dahil hinihintay na ‘ko ni Kuya Roel sa

dulo ng street.

“Ingat ka sa flight mo bukas,” Sevi kissed my forehead. “Chat ka.”

Tumango ako bago pumasok ng kotse. Kuya Roel said nothing even though he

probably saw Sevi’s kiss on my forehead. Hindi na lang din ako nag-explain. I

would sound defensive! Tsaka what would I say?! Na we were just.. friends?!

Ang dami ko nang lies. I would probably go to hell.

Our whole stay in Japan was nice but it was kind of boring for me because most

of the time, my parents would just leave me inside the hotel to attend a

business meeting! Hindi ko na alam kung vacation ba talaga ang pinunta nila

rito! But at least Dad would give me money so I could roam around, provided

that my location was turned on so they could track me.

I've been to Japan many times already so I already know where to go. I went to

Ginza to shop for gifts. I bought my mom a bracelet and my dad a watch. After

that, I went to Muji and bought my brother school stuff he would need for

studying.

I just didn't know what to get Sevi. Ang hirap niyang regaluhan! Alam kong

ayaw niya ng mga mahal na bagay kaya pinag-isipan kong mabuti.

The next morning, it was already Christmas so I messaged Sevi a greeting right

after taking a shower. Umalis ako nang maaga para magpunta sa nearest temple.

I wished good health for my family and Sevi's family.

I bought a 'Success' Omamori for Sevi. It was a pocket-sized lucky charm with

a special symbol made specifically to wish for the good success of someone. He

could tie it somewhere or treat it as a keychain.

sevirous: jwu happy birthday love

Kumunot ang noo ko nang mabasa ang message niya.

sevirous: MERRY CHRISTMAS PALA

sevirous: SORRY KAKAGISING KO LANG HAHAHAHA

elydezma: Eat breakfast. Mukhang namamatay na ang brain cells mo.

sevirous: okay bebi

I wanted so bad to go home na but my parents extended until January. I was so

bored na. Good thing my mom went to ski with me while my dad wasn't around.

Sobrang lamig sa labas kaya pumasok muna kami ni Mommy para mag-kape. She

rubbed her hands together and put two hands around the cup for warmth.

"You're not allowed to get tired," I reminded her.

"I'm fine, Eli," my mom gave me a sweet smile.

I waited for the coffee to cool down before I sipped on it. My mom was seated

beside me, still trying to warm her hands.

"You're happy, right?" She suddenly asked.

My brows furrowed when I looked back at her. Why would she suddenly ask that?

When she mentioned about being happy, I immediately thought about Sevi.

“Yes, Mom,” I nodded. “I am very happy.”

“That’s good. I just want you to be happy,” she held my hand.

“You, too.”

“Never depend on a man. Be a woman of your own,” she squeezed my hand and gave

me a smile. “So you won’t have to lose anything.”

I know that. I grew up thinking that in the future, the company will fall in

my hands. Paulit-ulit na sinasabi ni Daddy ‘yon ever since Shan started

treating him in a cold manner. I was my dad’s favorite. I could tell that.

“You have a strong personality. Stick with it. I know you will become

successful. More successful than me.”

We finally went back to the Philippines a week after New Year. We arrived

around midnight so I just rested until the next day. I woke up around noon and

went downstairs to eat my lunch. Nag-ayos na ‘ko kaagad pagkatapos kumain

dahil pupunta ako kila Sevi. I missed him so bad.

“I’ll text you, Kuya,” sabi ko kay Kuya Roel bago bumaba ng kotse.

Naglakad ako sa init papunta sa tapat ng bahay nila Sevi. I was even lost! I

was so bad with directions. Mabuti na lang nakita ko si Steven na naglalakad

kaya sinundan ko siya hanggang sa makarating sa tapat ng bahay nila.

“Steven,” I called.

“Hala,” napalingon siya sa’kin at humawak sa dibdib niya dahil sa gulat.

“Hi,” I laughed. “Is your brother inside?”

I didn’t tell Sevi because I wanted to surprise him. I was just hoping that he

was here para hindi naman masayang ang punta ko! Kung wala siya rito,

magagalit ako dahil hindi naman siya nag message na aalis siya today.

“Opo, Ate. Pasok po kayo.” Phew. Nakahinga ako nang maluwag.

I went inside and saw no one in the living room. Probably pumasok na sa office

ang Mom ni Sevi and si Sofia naman.. Baka tulog sa taas? Mukhang kakagaling

lang ni Steven sa basketball kasi may hawak pang bola at ice tubig.

“Kuya!” Sigaw niya sa hagdan.

“Ano!” I heard Sevi’s voice upstairs.

“Girlfriend ko, nandito!” Steven teased. “Gusto ka raw niya makilala!”

“Ano, gago, susumbong kita kay Mama!”

Narinig kong may bumukas na pinto. Sevi was probably on the way down. I

started hearing footsteps.

“Dalian mo, Kuya!”

“Girlfriend girlfriend, bata ka pa may- Oy!” Sevi’s eyes widened when he saw

me downstairs. Muntik pa siyang mahulog sa hagdan.

My mouth formed an ‘o’ when I saw him wearing nothing but black boxers. I

raised my brows at him and smirked. Mukhang kakaligo niya lang dahil basa pa

ang buhok at may towel sa balikat.

“Hi,” I smiled.

Dali-daling bumaba si Sevi sa hagdan at niyakap ako nang mahigpit. Steven

suddenly went upstairs with a disgusted face. Natawa tuloy ako.

“I missed you,” Sevi whispered on me.

“Missed you, baby,” I hugged him tighter.

“Kailan ka pa nakauwi? Sabi mo next week pa!” Binitawan niya ‘ko at sinamaan

ng tingin. “Scam ka talaga! Liar! Liar!”

“Uhm, duh? Kaya nga surprise, e! You’re getting dumber every day!” I rolled my

eyes and sat on the couch.

“Date tayo. Bihis lang ako,” umakyat na siya ng kwarto niya.

Date! Good thing I was wearing a yellow off-shoulder dress with floral

designs, white sandals, and white sling bag. Just perfect for a chill date.

Saan naman kaya kami pupunta nito? Anyway, I texted Kuya Roel so he could pick

us up. He was just around the corner naman.

Sevi went downstairs wearing a white polo shirt na short-sleeved and a pair of

maong pants. He also fixed his hair a bit. He looked so fresh and clean.

“Saan tayo?” I asked him.

“Ako bahala,” inakbayan niya ‘ko at hinatak na palabas.

“Kuya Roel will pick us up,” I informed him.

“Sige. Bulong ko na lang sa kanya.”

It made me more excited tuloy. I was really looking forward to it kaya panay

ang tingin ko sa labas ng kotse, trying to figure out if the road was familiar

but since I was so bad with directions, I really couldn’t tell the location.

We stopped in front of an unfamiliar place. Bumaba si Sevi at pinagbuksan ako

ng pinto bago kami pumasok sa loob. It was a bowling center! May restaurant sa

gilid and may billiard tables din sa kabilang side, separated by a glass wall.

Wala masyadong tao.

“Anong size ng paa mo?” Tanong sa’kin ni Sevi habang nasa counter.

“7,” sagot ko at sumandal sa counter.

The bowling area was glowing! It was a little dark din. Napatigil ako sa

pagtingin sa paligid nang kalabitin ako ni Sevi at binigay sa’kin ang bowling

shoes. Umupo kaagad ako at lumuhod siya sa harapan ko para tulungan akong

ilagay ‘yon.

“This is so spontaneous,” I laughed. “Nagbihis ka lang, alam mo na kung saan

tayo pupunta?”

“May listahan ako,” seryosong sabi niya habang inaayos ang sintas ko.

“What?” My brows furrowed.

“Listahan,” he got his phone out of his pocket and showed me the Notes app.

‘Good places to date with Amora Elyse’

Oh my gosh, he really had a list! I went through all of it and imagined our

dates. It would be so fun to spend time with him in these places. Kinikilig na

kaagad ako. How thoughtful.

“‘Yan lang ginagawa ko habang wala ka,” he chuckled. “Ang boring, e.”

“Can we add a staycation here?” I chuckled. “I know a good hotel.”

“Sige, pero pagkatapos mo na grumaduate,” he smirked.

“Damot!” I pouted. “Okay, then! Staycation right after my graduation, ah!”

After putting our shoes on, kumuha ako ng bola. Every color, iba ang weight

kaya pinili ko ‘yung pinakamagaan. Sevi could carry the heavy ones.

Nakakainggit.

“First time?” He asked me.

“Yes,” I nodded. “How about you?”

“First time din,” he said before walking backwards. Bumwelo pa siya bago niya

pinagulong ang bola.

My lips parted when he got a damn strike!

“What the hell, you liar! Hindi mo ‘to first time!” Hinampas ko kaagad siya.

Tinawanan niya lang ako. I rolled my eyes at him and held the ball on one

hand. Bumwelo rin ako bago ko pinagulong pero gumilid siya at na-shoot sa may

parang canal! Nakakainis lalo dahil tinawanan ako ni Sevi. Ang yabang!

“Nice try,” he smirked.

I tried again and hit three pins down. Tuwang tuwa akong tumalon at tinulak si

Sevi. The side of his lips rose up and got another ball. It was his turn na.

He hit 9 pins down! Sa susunod na bola, natumba niya pa ‘yung isa. Ngumisi

siya at pinagpagan kunwari ang sleeves ng damit niya para magyabang sa’kin. I

made a face and got another ball.

“Omg!” I jumped in excitement when I got a strike.

“Tsamba,” Sevi shook his head.

Kumuha ulit ako ng bola at pinagulong. I figured it out now! Ginaya ko lang

ang ginawa ko kanina at natumba ‘yung 8 pins!

“Ha!” I made a split on the floor like I was doing a stunt and flipped my

hair. “Loser!”

“Puta, nag-split,” Sevi laughed.

Tumatawa akong tumayo at binelatan siya. Kapag ako nanalo rito, I will do a

damn back flip. I can do that.

“Yabang mo, oy. Sineswerte ka lang,” umiling si Sevi at kumuha ng bola.

Sevi got so competitive after that! Tinatrato niya na ‘ko na parang kalaban

niya sa basketball tuwing UAAP. Gosh! Wala siyang awa! I got competitive too

because he was so serious about the game!

“O, talo ka,” he smirked when we checked our scores. “May dare ka!”

“What?! Sinong may sabi?! We didn’t agree on that!” Reklamo ko kaagad.

“Panalo ako kaya dapat may kapalit!” Gosh, he was so competitive. Athlete nga

siya.

“What? You want a damn trophy? A medal?” I rolled my eyes. “Oh! By the way!

Sige! I’ll give you something!”

Naalala ko bigla ang regalo ko sa kanya. Kinuha ko ang bag ko at hinalungkat

ang maliit na red box doon. He looked like he was anticipating for it. Hindi

ko pa naaabot sa kanya ay nilahad na niya ang dalawang kamay niya like a puppy

asking for water.

“Ano ‘to?” He asked after opening the box.

Hindi niya alam kung ano ‘yon pero tuwang tuwa na siya. What a baby.

“It’s a lucky charm for success,” I explained briefly. “Because of that, you

will become successful!”

“Wow!” He exaggerated his reaction. “Thank you. Kailangan ko ‘to. Malapit na

‘ko mag boards.”

“Oh, right. When are you going to take it?” Naalala ko graduating na pala

siya.

“November. Magrereview pa ‘ko after graduation.”

He put the lucky charm inside his wallet and gave me back the box because it

was too big. After playing another round, we decided to eat at the restaurant.

The whole day was so fun. Nakakainis lang na kailangan kong umuwi. I wanted to

spend the night with him. Kapag naka-graduate na ‘ko at may work na, I’ll ask

him to live with me. We can live together!

The next week, he became busy kaya hindi kami nagkikita. Hindi ko alam kung

anong pinagkakaabalahan niya. Naging abala rin ako dahil sinasamahan ko si

Mommy sa hospital for her check-ups.

“Steven,” I called his brother when I stopped in front of their house. I was

hoping to see Sevi today. “Where’s your Kuya?”

“Uh,” lumingon siya sa loob ng bahay nila at tinignan ako ulit. “Hindi pa po

siya umuuwi simula kahapon, e.”

“What?!” My brows furrowed.

He did not tell me that! I mean, he called yesterday to check on me but he

didn’t tell me that he wasn’t home! Nag-init ang ulo ko!

“Saan daw siya nagpunta?” I fished for more information.

“Hindi ko po alam pero may kausap siyang babae sa phone tapos bigla na lang po

siyang nagmamadaling umalis,” napakamot si Steven sa ulo niya. “May pupuntahan

daw po s-siya.. ‘Yung babae po.. ‘yung pupuntahan.”

“Sinong babae?!” Kumukulo na ang dugo ko!

“H-hindi ko po alam, Ate! Huwag kang magalit sa’kin! Sinasabi ko lang ang

totoo!” Steven was so defensive.

Nagpasalamat ako sa kanya at galit na bumalik sa kotse. I asked Kuya Roel to

go to the hospital where I will meet my mom. Habang nasa kotse, tinawagan ko

si Sevi. Mabuti naman at sumagot siya!

“Where the hell are you?” Bungad ko.

[Babe!] Gulat na sabi niya.

“Babe? Babe your face! Where are you?! I went to your house but you weren’t

there!” Naiinis na ‘ko!

[Galing ka sa bahay?] He still didn’t answer my question.

“Yes nga! Answer my damn question. Where are you?”

[May emergency kasi kaya umalis ako. Kita tayo mamaya.]

“What emergency?” Mas lalong kumunot ang noo ko.

[Sevi, babe, bumalik ka na rito, please.. Hindi pa tayo tapos mag-sex..] I

heard a woman’s voice.

My jaw dropped.

[Hoy pucha! Gago ka talaga tangina-] He ended the call.

My heart was beating so fast I could have a heart attack! What the hell! I had

to open the window so I could get fresh air. I tried to calm myself but I just

couldn’t! What the fuck was that?! Was he cheating on me?!

Ang daming pumapasok sa utak ko! Sevi was calling again but I ignored him.

Ayokong makipag-usap habang galit ako! Gosh, baka kung anong masabi ko sa

kanya! Magugulat si Kuya Roel sa dami ng murang lalabas sa bibig ko!

When the car stopped in front of the hospital’s lobby, dire-diretso lang akong

pumasok at sumakay sa elevator. Pumunta ako sa pinakalikod at pinakagilid nang

may pumasok na mga doctor.

My eyes widened when I saw Sevi. Hindi niya ‘ko napansin at nakatayo lang

doon. What the hell!

I will catch you, dumbass!

I should be getting off at 2nd floor but I wanted to follow him. Nang bumaba

siya sa 5th floor ay bumaba rin ako at nagtago muna sa pader para tignan kung

saan siya pupunta.

“I swear to God, I will punch this guy so hard he won’t see the sunrise the

next day,” I whispered to myself.

He went inside a room. Nang isara niya ‘yon sumunod ako at dinikit ang tenga

ko sa pinto. I could hear a woman inside. May pinag-uusapan sila pero hindi ko

maintindihan.

Kinuha ko ang phone ko at tinawagan si Sevi.

[Eli!] Sagot kaagad niya.

I waited outside the door until it opened.

“Oh shit!” Nanlaki ang mata ni Sevi nang makita akong naghihintay sa tapat ng

pinto niya. He held his chest out of shock, hawak pa ang phone sa tenga.

I was glaring at him, hindi inaalis ang tingin sa kanya kahit binaba ko na ang

phone ko at pinatay ang tawag. Gulat pa rin siyang nakatingin sa’kin.

“Who are you with?” Seryosong tanong ko.

“Si-”

Tinulak ko siya pagilid at tuloy-tuloy na naglakad papasok ng hospital room,

ready to catch him cheating.

“Who the hell is this woma-”

My eyes widened when I saw a familiar face. I covered my mouth in shock and

stepped backwards.

“Oh,” the woman laughed when she saw me.

“Hay,” Sevi sighed heavily. “Yanna, si Elyse. Elyse, si Yanna.”

I looked around the room but there was no one but us. Matagal kong tinignan si

Yanna. She was also looking at me with an amused look. Parang tuwang tuwa pa

siya.

My eyes widened when I noticed her tummy. Mabilis akong napalingon kay Sevi.

“What the fuck?!” I glared at Sevi. “Did you.. get her pregnant?!”

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16

“Bakit ako?! Hindi ako!”

Hinampas ko si Sevi gamit ang bag ko at agad niyang hinarang ang kamay niya

para pigilan ako. Umilag-ilag pa siya, ha! Padabog akong umupo sa sofa at

tinignan nang masama si Yanna. My god! Siya nanaman?!

She was Hiro’s ex! Or whatever! Hindi naman ata naging sila! Wala akong alam

about them.

“Magkaibigan lang kami,” mahinahong pagpapaliwanag ni Sevi.

“Sure ka?” Yanna smirked at him.

Tumayo ako at susugurin na sana siya nang pigilan ako ni Sevi at hinatak ulit

paupo ng sofa. My gosh! The smug look on her face! Kung hindi lang siya

buntis, hahampasin ko siya!

“Tumawag sila Kierra nung isang araw na sumasakit daw tyan ni Yanna kaya

sinugod sa hospital. Malapit na kasi ‘yung due niya. Umuwi sila saglit kaya

ako ‘yung nagbabantay dito. Pabalik naman na sila Sam,” tinignan niya ang relo

niya.

“And why didn’t you tell me?!” I was still glaring at him.

“I’m sorry. Nakalimutan ko,” umupo siya sa tabi ko at hinawakan ang kamay ko.

“Does Hiro know about this?” Tinaasan ko ng kilay si Yanna.

Matagal siyang napatitig sa’kin pero agad ding umiwas ng tingin. She pursed

her lips and her expression changed to being serious.

“Bakit niya kailangan malaman? Hindi naman naging kami at matagal na kaming

hindi nag-uusap. Anong pakialam niya kung nabuntis ako ng ibang lalaki, ha?”

She raised her brow at me.

“Are you sure hindi ikaw ‘yon?” Siniko ko si Sevi.

“Hindi nga ako! Kadiri, oy!” Sevi looked so disgusted which made Yanna laugh.

“Kung may balak kang sabihin, wag na,” Yanna rolled her eyes. “Alam na niya na

nabuntis ako ng iba kaya nga hindi na kami nag-uusap, e.”

“He knows?” My brows furrowed.

“Paulit-ulit ka, girl?” Yanna chuckled.

“You cheated on him, huh?” I concluded because that was what she said.

“Ewan ko sa’yo,” mukhang napipikon na siya. “Bigay mo na sa’kin ‘to. Walang

nakakaalam nito kung hindi kami-kaming magkakaibigan. Huwag kang mangialam.”

“Okay, fine! I wasn’t even planning to!”

I felt like she really didn’t want me to talk. She was right. It was also not

my story to tell. I should respect her privacy. Sila-sila lang palang

magkakaibigan ang nakakaalam tapos.. pagkakalat ko? Gosh! That would put me in

a bad light! Sevi might get turned off! Baka mag-away pa kami!

Kung anong mayroon sa kanila ng ex-crush ko, sa kanila na ‘yon. Hindi ko

kailangan mangialam sa kanilang dalawa. Besides, they already separated!

What’s the damn point?! Who would want to hear such things about their ex?

“Sev, kuha mo nga ‘ko ng tubig,” utos ni Yanna.

My brows furrowed when Sevi stood up to get her a bottle of water. Yanna

looked at me again and smirked just to annoy the hell out of me! Wow, kung

iniinis niya talaga ako, gumagana!

I swear, kung hindi lang siya buntis!

“Sev, paalalay nga. Uupo ako,” utos niya ulit.

My lips parted when Sevi went to her and helped her up, holding her back and

waist. Humawak pa siya sa braso ni Sevi at ngumisi sa’kin. She squeezed Sevi’s

arms and caressed it! What the hell!

“Grabe muscles mo,” malanding sabi ni Yanna. “Nakakamiss ka naman kasama sa

kama.”

“You fucking-” I immediately stood up.

“Yanna, tangina naman,” binitawan kaagad siya ni Sevi at lumayo.

Yanna laughed like a devil. She knew what she was doing! She wanted to see my

reaction! Ano ba ‘to? Bumabawi ba siya dahil sinusungitan ko siya noon?! Gosh!

Ang epal!

“Huwag kang maniwala dyan. Nanggagago lang ‘yan,” Sevi shook his head and

glared at Yanna.

“Hindi mo sure, Elyse,” Yanna gave me a smug look.

Kinuha ko ang phone ko at kunwaring may tinawagan. “Hiro? Hey! Where are you?

Busy ka?”

Her lips parted in shock. Hah! I got her! Natahimik tuloy siya at hindi na

nagsalita. I smirked and went back to my seat. Now I know how to make her shut

up. Game over, Yanna!

“Sevi, manganganak ako nang maaga sa atabs mo,” Yanna shook her head.

Napatingin kami sa pinto nang bumukas ‘yon. I saw Kierra holding a paper bag.

Damit siguro na pamalit. Nagulat siya at napahinto nang makita ako roon. She

gave me a gorgeous smile before looking at Sevi.

“Wala pa sila Sam?” Tanong niya at sinara na ang pinto.

“Wala pa. Katipunan pa ‘yon, e.”

Lumapit siya sa gilid ko at nilapag ang paper bag sa may katabing cabinet.

Napakunot ang noo ko nang makaamoy ako ng familiar na perfume sa kanya. Hindi

ko matandaan kung saan ko naamoy ‘yon but it was familiar!

“Hoy buntis, tagal mo naman manganak,” she looked at Yanna.

“Aalis na kami,” hinawakan ni Sevi ang braso ko at hinatak na ‘ko patayo.

“Kapag nanatili pa kami rito, maghihiwalay na kami dahil dyan kay Yanna, e.”

Tumawa lang si Yanna at kumaway na sa’min paalis. I stuck my tongue out and

made a face before walking out of the room.

“Mature!” Rinig kong sigaw ni Yanna sa loob.

I smirked by myself while Sevi was still pulling me by my arm. Binawi ko

kaagad ang braso ko at masama siyang tinignan bago siya nilagpasan. I needed

to go to my mom! I almost forgot! Kaya nga pala ako nandito!

Sumunod sa’kin si Sevi hanggang sa elevator. Nang lumabas ako, sinundan niya

pa rin ako hanggang sa makarating kami sa tapat ng clinic ng doctor ni Mommy.

My mom was already there, waiting.

“Mommy!” Tawag ko at kumaway. “I’m sorry, I’m late! Something happened.”

“It’s okay. Kakatapos ko lang magpacheck-up,” my mom stood up and smiled at

Sevi. “Hello.”

“Good afternoon po!” Sevi looked surprised. He probably didn’t expect that my

mom would be here. Wala naman siyang alam na may sakit si Mommy. “Nagkita lang

po kami ni Elyse sa elevator.”

“We’ll talk tomorrow,” sinamaan ko ng tingin si Sevi bago humawak sa braso ni

Mommy. “Let’s go, Mom.”

“Bye po,” Sevi turned to my mom.

The next day, my parents were both out for work so I texted Sevi to go to my

house so we could talk about what happened yesterday. Hindi niya sinabi

sa’king hindi siya umuuwi sa bahay nila. We should really fix that! He should

update me from time-to-time!

I was already drinking tea outside the house, sa may garden, while waiting for

him. When I heard the doorbell, umikot na lang ako sa gilid at nakita si Sevi

sa labas ng pintuan namin, mukhang kinakabahan. He was wearing a pair of black

shorts and a striped shirt.

“Hey,” tawag ko sa kanya mula sa gilid. “Camero.”

Napalingon kaagad siya sa’kin at may tinago sa likod niya. I gestured him to

follow me so he did. Umikot kami papuntang garden at umupo ako sa white metal

chair. Kinuha niya ang isang upuan at hinatak para malapit sa’kin.

“Uy,” tawag niya nang umupo siya.

I sipped on my tea, ignoring him. Yes, pinapunta ko siya rito so he would know

that I’m really pissed.

“Sorry na,” he said softly.

Nilapag ko ang tea cup ko sa lamesa. I avoided his gaze and just stared in

front, counting the flowers. Lahat gagawin ko just to ignore him.

My brows furrowed when my vision got blocked by a red rose.

“I’m sorry,” Sevi looked shy while handing me the rose.

Oh my gosh, this guy! Hindi ko tuloy natiis at kinuha kaagad ang rose mula sa

kamay niya. I bit the insides of my cheek to prevent a smile but I just

couldn’t! Napangiti kaagad ako sa sobrang corny niya.

“You’re so baduy,” I laughed.

“At least effective,” he smiled at pinched my cheek. “Hindi ka na galit

sa’kin?”

“Galit ako, okay? You just made me smile but I am still mad!” I defended.

“Bakit ka galit?” He pulled his chair closer so he could face me. “Pag-usapan

natin ‘to. Saan ka ba nagagalit para maayos ko?”

“You didn’t tell me that you weren’t home. Hindi ko pa malalaman kung hindi

kita pupuntahan sa house niyo. You should have.. like.. texted me saying that

your friend had an emergency and you needed to go to the hospital?” I ranted

but in a calm way.

“Sorry, mali ako roon,” he sighed. “Magtetext na ‘ko sa’yo kung saan ako

pupunta. Basta ikaw din sabihin mo sa’kin, ah.”

“Okay, that’s fair,” I nodded.

“Ano pa?” He urged me to talk.

“Was Yanna lying about uh.. bed..”

“Yuck!” Agad nandiri ang mukha niya. “Hard pass, oy!”

“I was just making sure!”

“Tropa tropa lang, promise. Kung ano mang pinagsasasabi ni Yanna, inaasar ka

lang noon. Mahilig lang ‘yon mamikon kaya huwag kang maniwala roon. Putulin mo

man daliri ko kung nagsisinungaling ako,” he showed me his hand.

“Okay,” I nodded and sipped on my tea again. “You want to try?”

Binigay ko sa kanya ang cup at kinuha naman niya ‘yon. Inamoy pa niya bago

niya tinikman. I looked at the back door when I saw Jewel running towards us.

When she barked, Sevi jumped on his seat, spilling the tea on the grass.

“Ah! Ano ‘yan!” He pointed at my dog, panicking.

“What do you mean ‘ano ‘yan’?! This is my dog!” I carried Jewel. I was so

offended!

“Ah, oo nga,” kumalma na siya at bumalik na sa pagkakaupo. “Natapon tuloy

‘yung tsaa, amp.”

Jewel was just staring at him, kinikilala siguro siya. That was weird.

Usually, Jewel would bark at other people but she looked so calm with Sevi.

Gosh, mana sa amo.

“I think she likes you,” I looked at Jewel.

“Luh, sorry Miss, may girlfriend ako,” he gave Jewel a pat on the head.

“Did you hear that? He’s mine already,” sabi ko kay Jewel.

She barked at me so I put her down on the grass. She licked Sevi’s leg before

running away again. I giggled while Sevi was wiping his leg with the tissue.

The next day, Sevi and I went to the hospital again because Yanna just gave

birth to a baby girl during midnight. I didn’t know why but I felt so excited

to see the baby. When we entered the room, si Sam lang ang nandoon at si Yanna

na natutulog.

“Omg, hi! Long time no see, Eli!” Bumeso sa’kin si Sam at ngumiti kay Sevi. “I

didn’t know you guys are.. a thing.”

“Busy ka kasi. Outdated ka na,” Sevi shook his head in disappointment. “Nasaan

si Avi?”

Sam pointed at the small crib at the other side of the room. May light na

nakatapat sa crib.

“Oh my gosh, she’s so cute,” I whispered.

The baby was sleeping. We weren’t allowed to touch it yet so hanggang tingin

na lang muna kami. I noticed some familiar features of the baby but I couldn’t

point it out. I just knew that this girl would grow up so pretty.

“We just need to be quiet. Yanna’s really really tired,” Sam was whispering.

“Normal delivery naman?” Sevi asked.

“Yeah. Smooth din ang delivery, thank God,” Sam sighed. “The baby’s healthy

din, but they will run more tests to make sure that she’s normal.”

“Kanina ka pa nandito?” Tanong ulit ni Sevi.

“Yeah, even during labor and delivery. Gosh, feeling ko ako ‘yung tatay, e!”

Sam giggled. “Naiyak pa ‘ko! So embarrassing. Parang ako ‘yung nanganak.”

Oh, right, right! Bestfriends sila! Ngayon ko lang naalala. Sam would bring

Yanna to parties. Napaisip tuloy ako kung anong mafefeel ko kapag si Ida ang

nanganak. I would probably cry, too. I would treat that child like my own

daughter.

I looked at the baby girl again and imagined myself giving birth. Oh gosh,

hindi ko ata kakayanin. I admire Yanna for being strong! Pregnancy is scary!

“Ikaw, Sevi? Hindi ka pa mag-aanak?” Sam teased.

“Matagal pa ‘ko,” Sevi chuckled. “Hihintayin ko pa si Eli. Kailangan stable na

bago ‘yon.”

My face heated. He was.. thinking of his future with me?! I was included in

his plans! I never thought I would be this happy to hear that. Marami na

siyang goals sa future pero nagawa niya pa rin akong isingit doon.

Sevi and I were okay. We had to go back to school a week after that so naging

busy na ulit kaming dalawa but we still made time for each other. Siguro twice

a week, magde-date kami. Before Valentine’s Day, namomroblema na ‘ko. I wanted

to bake for him but I didn’t know how to bake!

“Eli, are you listening?” Good thing mom was there to help me! “I said mix it

until medyo sticky na siya. You can do that right?”

“Yes,” I was so determined to mix what was in the bowl. We were baking heart

brownies! “You think he will like this, Mom?”

“If a guy loves you, lahat ng ibibigay mo, magugustuhan niya. Kahit small

keychain lang or kahit simple shirt, you know. It’s the thought that counts.”

“Smells good!” My eyes widened when my dad walked in the kitchen. “What’s this

for?”

“Dad!” I panicked. “I.. I just-”

“Oh, Elyse is helping me bake brownies. I was planning to give my friends a

box for Valentine’s Day,” mom answered for me.

“Don’t forget to give me some!” Dad really bought that excuse and smiled.

As soon as he walked out of the kitchen, I sighed heavily. Nakalimutan ko

atang huminga sa sobrang kaba.

“Thank you, Mommy,” I pouted.

“Gotchu, love,” my mom chuckled.

Pagkatapos namin mag-bake ni Mommy, tumikim ako ng isa. I was so happy when it

tasted good! Finally! Matutuwa si Sevi nito. Ipagyayabang ko na marunong na

‘ko mag-bake even though my mom helped me with it.

The next day, nilagay ko ‘yung brownies sa pink box and arranged it carefully.

Nilagyan ko pa ng white ribbon and note bago ako nagpahatid kay Kuya Roel

papunta sa bahay nila Sevi. We would pick Sevi up, go to an art exhibit, then

we’ll go to the highest building with a restaurant to have dinner.

“Kuya Roel, you don’t have a date today?” I asked. “Are you sure this is

okay?”

“Wala po akong girlfriend, Ma’am,” sagot niya naman, natatawa.

“Don’t you want to have fun this Valentine’s Day? I can ask Sevi to drive the

car.” I was worried about his lovelife.

“Wala rin po akong gagawin ngayon, Ma’am,” tanggi niya pa rin. “Huwag po

kayong mag-alala, hindi naman ako bababa ng sasakyan at susunod sa inyo para

mag third wheel.”

“Hala, that was not what I meant,” I defended.

Tumawa lang siya habang nagda-drive. I fixed my outfit before Sevi opened the

car. I prepared for this! Nakasuot ako ng brown fitted satin dress with a thin

strap, and a white Chanel cropped-top jacket. My dress was 4 inches above my

knee.

“Wow,” he smiled at my outfit.

I asked him to wear something semi-formal with a touch of color brown so we

could match. He was wearing a dark brown, dress shirt with three buttons

opened and then black slacks. Tinupi niya ang sleeves hanggang siko dahil

masyado raw formal.

“Wala kang flowers?” I joked.

“Ang dami nang namimigay ng flowers, mamamatay din naman,” he shook his head.

“Kaya iba ang ibibigay ko sa’yo.”

“What is it?”

“Mamaya na. Excited ka, ah.”

Okay, then! I also decided not to give him my brownies yet. He held my hand

and intertwined it with his while we were on our way to an art exhibit. I

thanked Kuya Roel before getting out of the car.

It was exclusive so kaunti lang ang tao sa loob. I held Sevi’s hand and we

walked around, looking at the paintings. Mayroon ding building designs na nasa

loob ng glass. They used recycled materials for it. It was amazing.

“I like this painting,” I pointed at the expensive painting. It was abstract.

“If we decide to live together in the future, I want a painting just like

this.”

“Let’s live together,” he put his arms around me while looking at the

painting.

“Okay. Kapag may work na ‘ko, I can leave the house and live with you. We can

do that, right?” I looked at him.

“Sige, pag-iipunan ko ‘yan. Mauuna ako magkatrabaho sa’yo,” he laughed. “Baka

kumuha rin ako ng condo malapit sa company para madali. Wala pa ‘kong

sasakyan, e.”

“And then I’ll move in? If.. pumayag si Daddy,” I chuckled. “I promise I’ll

introduce you to him after my graduation.”

Yeah, we can do that. We agreed to do that.

After the exhibit, pinag-drive ulit kami ni Kuya Roel papunta sa restaurant. I

gave him money so he could also look around and eat. Sevi put his hand on my

waist while we were inside the elevator. Nasa pinakataas ang restaurant, where

we can see the city lights. I was holding my box of brownies but he didn’t ask

about it. He didn’t want to spoil himself.

“I love you,” he suddenly whispered on my ear.

I bit my lower lip to stop myself from smiling. May mga tao sa elevator so

nahihiya akong bumulong din sa kanya. Kailangan ko pa kasi tumingkayad para

maabot siya, even though I was already wearing heels.

When the elevator opened, we stepped outside and was welcomed by a waiter

asking for our names. I took care of the reservation. After checking, he guided us to our table. Pinili ko ‘yung table near the glass wall where we can see the buildings.

“Thank you,” I told the waiter after making our orders.

“Half-half?” Sevi asked.

“Yeah, we can do that,” I smiled at him. “Or I can treat you.”

“Huwag na,” umiling kaagad siya. “Nag ipon na ‘ko para rito. Sabi ko na nga ba sa mamahaling restaurant mo ‘ko dadalhin, e. Advance ako mag-isip, oy.”

I giggled and placed my box on the table. I slid it over so it could reach him. Nagtataka niyang tinignan ‘yon bago inabot sa’kin ang paper bag na hawak niya. I also did not ask about that.

We opened it at the same time. I smiled when I saw preserved flowers placed in a glass dome. There were yellow and pink roses and other small flowers arranged and designed beautifully. May cute fairy lights pa na nakapaikot. It looked so pretty.

I looked at the cute sticky note attached on the glass.

Happy Valentine’s Day, Elyse. I love you.

- Engineer Camero (kung papalarin)

Kung hindi, non-showbiz boyfriend na lang.

Natawa ako habang nagbabasa. I flipped it and saw another note.

Roses are red

Violets are blue

Something's not dead

It's my love for you

I laughed and had the urge to hit him with that glass. Napaka corny, my gosh,

pero kinilig ako. He also looked happy when he saw my heart-shaped brownies.

"I baked that!" I proudly said.

"Sure ka walang lason 'to?" He playfully smelled it. "Hindi ba 'ko mamamatay

dito?"

"If you don't want it, then just give it back," nagtampo na 'ko!

"Joke lang. Sure ako masarap 'to! Ikaw gumawa, e!" He smiled at me. "Thank

you, amore."

"Te amo," I gave him a finger heart.

"Ano? Minura mo ba 'ko?" His brows furrowed.

"Stupid! I said I love you in Spanish," I rolled my eyes. He just ruined the

mood!

“Taena mo,” he mocked. “‘Yun ‘yung narinig ko, e!”

The waiter already served our food so we didn’t have time to argue anymore. We

ate while talking about other personal stuff like what happened with his day

and what happened with mine. I was ranting about my blockmate while drinking

wine. He was listening carefully.

“And then he said, why did I erase his name sa output?! The audacity?!”

Reklamo ko.

“Kapal naman!” He gasped dramatically.

“Right?! I mean, shut up, Ray-ray, you literally suck at everything except

cheating at your girlfriend!”

“Period!” Sevi cheered for me.

I laughed at his reaction. Nakakainis siya pero natatawa ako sa kanya. That

was how we celebrated our first Valentine’s Day together. After eating, we

went outside to look at the buildings. Sumandal ako sa railings habang

nakahawak siya sa bewang ko.

“I can’t wait for you to build something like that,” I pointed at a tall

building.

“Sana nga,” he chuckled. “Ang galing nila, ‘no? Sana ganyan din ako kagaling.”

“Of course!” I looked at him. “Hindi lang ganyan kagaling. You will be the

best! You will do better!”

“Sana all enthusiastic,” he laughed. “Thank you, baby. Hintayin mo. Pagkatapos

ko grumaduate at makapasa ng boards, panis ‘yan sa’kin.”

I couldn’t wait for him to graduate. Ganoon na lang ang excitement ko when I

received a message from him. I was in class when he sent me his graduation

picture. I smiled at his handsome face. Sobrang unfair! Ang pogi niya lalo sa

grad pic!

elydezma: How could someone look that handsome smh

sevirous: hay ako lang ‘to

elydezma: So excited for your grad! Sayang limited lang ang tickets.

sevirous: ops wag mong batiin baka di matuloy hahahaha

sevirous: kukuhanan kita ng tix wag kang mag alala bb

During finals week, we became more busy but that did not stop us from seeing

each other. I would go to his house so we could study together. It was

actually effective. Siya ang nagrereview sa’kin at nagtatanong ng questions.

“Tama ako, right? Tama ako! I deserve a kiss!” Ngumuso ako habang nakaupo sa

kama niya.

“Tama!” He gave me a soft kiss before looking at my reviewer again. “O, eto.

Enumerate mo, ah.”

I had a hard time enumerating it but I still got it right. I reached for him

so he could give me another kiss. Nakahiga siya sa kama at nakaupo ako sa

gilid niya. I straddled his hips and kissed him again, giggling.

“Sobra na ‘yon, ah,” Sevi protested.

“Lima inenumerate ko so limang kiss din!” I defended.

“Nakakailan ka na, ah! Chansing ka lang sa’kin!”

I kissed him again to make him shut up. He gave up and placed the reviewer on

the side table before wrapping his arms around me. I bit his lower lip and

sucked it before kissing him again. His hand went inside my shirt to massage

my chest. I moaned and kissed him harder.

“O next na, next na,” he stopped and pushed me lightly. “Aral na ulit!”

He was so in control. I admired that about him.

Hinintay ko ulit siya after ng finals niya. I was outside his building,

holding two cones of ice cream. I looked at my watch. He would be here by now.

Dapat bilisan niya because the ice cream will melt!

Lumiwanag ang mukha ko nang makitang naglalabasan na ‘yung engineering

students. I jumped in excitement when I saw Sevi laughing with his blockmates.

They were talking about something related to construction.

“Jowa mo, pre,” siniko siya ng blockmate niya.

Napatingin kaagad sa’kin si Sevi. His smiled wider and walked fast towards me

to give me a hug. Inangat ko kaagad ang ice cream dahil baka matapon.

“Good job, babe!” Inabot ko ang ice cream sa kanya nang bitawan na niya ‘ko.

“Ice cream! It’s your reward! How’s the exam?”

“Okay lang,” Sevi said while holding the cone. “Pasado naman.. Sana! Hahaha!”

“Let’s go! I’ll treat you! Road to QPAV na!” Humawak ako sa bewang niya habang

naglalakad.

They had that ‘road to QPAV’ saying that meant road to graduation because they

usually hold their graduation ceremonies in QPAV, the yellow building. Sevi

explained that to me last month. Funny how naaadapt ko pati kung paano sila

magsalita.

We ate in a karinderya. I was listening to him while he was talking about his

finals. May pinapaliwanag siya sa'king related to their subject but I couldn't understand so tumatango na lang ako.

"Diba? Diba tama naman ako?" He pointed at the paper.

"Uh, yeah," I nodded. Hindi ko alam ang sinasabi niya! Hindi naman ako engineering!

"O, diba? Pero 'yung iba kong kaklase iba 'yung sinagot. Ang gulo. Bahala na,"

he scratched his head in frustration.

"Hayaan mo na. It's already over. Stop thinking about the things you can't control," I cheered him up. "You can't change it anymore. Look forward na."

He had more free time while preparing for their graduation. Bumalik na rin ako sa school for the next term. It was so annoying because may class ako sa day ng graduation niya! I couldn't miss it so I made sure walang quizzes or activities bago ako nag-cut. First time ko naman mag-cut sa afternoon subjects so okay lang!

"Sige, aabsent din ako para pareho tayo," Ida laughed.

"No, attend class so you can report to me!" I stopped her.

"Hmp! Boring naman, e!" She pouted.

Tumawa lang ako at kinuha ang gamit ko bago lumabas. Hinatid ulit ako ni Kuya

Roel sa UST. Sobrang traffic so I was late. They were already starting when I

went in with my ticket. I was seated next to Sevi's mom. Si Steven sa kabilang

side niya and si Sofia, kandong niya.

"Hi," I smiled at Sofia.

"Games?" She asked me.

Sa'kin na siya kumandong habang naglalaro ng games sa phone ko.

"Camero, Sebastian Vincent."

I clapped so hard when his name was called. Kinuha ko muna ang phone ko kay

Sofia so I could take a video of him. I was so proud! I wanted to cheer for

him but it wasn't a basketball game so I just stayed on my seat. Besides, ang

daming pumapalakpak sa kanya because.. Well, he was famous.

I waited for the ceremony to be over. Pagkatapos, lumabas na kami ng family ni

Sevi. Hawak-hawak ko si Sofia while we were waiting for Sevi outside. I was

holding a bouquet for him, too!

"Ayun na siya," his mom pointed somewhere.

Binigay ko muna si Sofia sa Mommy niya bago ako tumakbo papunta kay Sevi. His

eyes widened when he saw me coming but also opened his arms so I could go

straight to him. Muntik pa kaming matumba nang yumakap ako sa kanya.

“Congratulations!” I jumped in excitement.

“Thank you, love,” he hugged me back with one hand. ‘Yung isa, inaayos ‘yung

cap niya.

“I’m so proud of you!” I kissed him on his cheek.

“Mas masaya ka pa ata kaysa sa’kin,” he chuckled.

“Of course, duh!”

I let him go so he could hug his mother. He kissed Sofia’s cheek and pulled

Steven’s hair playfully. Sobrang bully!

“Aray ko!” Steven smacked him on his arm.

“Naghanda ako ng pagkain sa bahay. Halika, Elyse,” aya sa’kin ng Mommy niya.

I was hopping like a kid while Sevi’s hand was on my shoulder. We took

pictures in front of the main building and also sa arch kahit mahirap

makisingit. At least we had a picture. I was kissing him on his cheek while he

was smiling and holding his cap. His hand was around my waist. It was my

favorite picture.

Pagkauwi namin sa kanila, he went upstairs to change his clothes. I also went

upstairs with him. As soon as he closed the door, he gave me a kiss. I closed

my eyes and wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling him closer.

“So proud of you,” I whispered.

He kissed me again before hugging me so tight. Binaon niya ang mukha niya sa

leeg ko. It was so comforting.

“Thank you,” he kissed my cheek.

“Board exam na next! I’m so excited! I bet you’ll pass in one take!”

“Masyado naman atang malaki tiwala mo sa’kin,” he laughed. “Mabuti ‘yon. Dito

ka lang, ah. Huwag kang aalis.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll always be here,” I held his face. “I’ll celebrate every

milestone with you.”

:)

17

“Wala ka pang boyfriend, Eli?”

I almost choked on my food when Ate Helen suddenly asked. It was her birthday

today so inaya niya kami ng birthday dinner. Kami-kami lang naman nila Kuya

and then ‘yung iba nilang friends. Hindi ko na sila masyadong nakakausap. I

guess I was just so occupied with studies and Sevi. Ngayon lang ulit ako

nagpakita sa kanila.

My brother looked at me, waiting for an answer. Nakakatakot naman ang tingin

niya!

“W-wala pa,” I denied and sipped on my water.

“Wala pa talaga? Hindi na ata namin maabutan na magka-boyfriend ka,” Ate

Ericka pouted.

“What? Why?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

“Huwag niyo nang ipilit na magka-boyfriend,” masungit na sabi ni Kuya. He

looked so tired! 2nd year na siya sa law school. I think nahihirapan siya

lalo.

“Oh, Ericka and I are going to take our masters in U.S.,” Ate Helen explained.

“But we’re still processing the papers.”

“What? You’re leaving?” I pouted more. “After Hiro, kayo naman ang aalis?!”

“Come on! Ilang years lang ‘yun and then babalik na rin kami kaagad! Unlike

Hiro na roon na talaga titira. Don’t worry!” Ate Ericka tried to console me.

“We might leave next year if ma-process kaagad ‘yung papers.”

They were becoming more and more busy now. I guess that’s what ‘adulting’

makes you. Nakakatakot naman tumanda. Pakiramdam ko nawawalan na sila ng oras

para sa sarili nila. They either spend time working or studying like my

brother.

“Ikaw, Shan? Girlfriend?” Tanong ni Kuya Neil.

Muntik na ring masamid si Kuya sa iniinom niyang tubig. Tumaas ang kilay ko

habang nakatingin sa kanya, hinihintay ang sagot niya. May tinatago talaga

‘to, e! I couldn’t sense it, though!

“Wala, I’m busy,” he shook his head.

“Weh! Dati kapag nagtatanong kami kung may girlfriend ka, sasabihin mo ‘sino

roon?’!”

“My girlfriend is the law,” he chuckled. “It makes me crazy. Hindi na

kailangan ang girlfriend. No time for that.”

“O sige, fling na lang, ‘no?”

“Maybe,” Shan shrugged.

I couldn’t keep up especially when they were talking about work and masters!

Oh gosh, pakiramdam ko kasama ko ang matatanda. I had to go home early because

of that. May pasok pa ‘ko kinabukasan, e. Buti pa sila, maglalasing na lang.

Hindi ko lang alam kay Kuya.

For Sevi’s birthday, I organized a surprise party with the help of Sam. She

agreed to do it in her condo. I only invited his close friends, including

Arkin but may shooting siya so hindi siya makakapunta.

“Ang pangit dyan, huwag niyo dyan ilagay ‘yung lobo!” Luna pointed at the

balloons.

“Luna, ang ingay ng bunganga mo. Pag nagising anak ko, sasakmalin kita,” Yanna

asked her to shut up because Avi was sleeping on the other room.

“He’s on his way,” I announced while looking at my phone.

Via, I now know her name, was the one preparing the food. She was the other

Archi student na friend nila. Kierra was helping Luna design the room. Sam was

helping Via.

“He’s here!” I yelled when I received Sevi’s text.

Kinuha ko ang cake at pinatay namin ang ilaw pagkatapos sindihan ang candles.

We panicked when we heard the doorbell. Sam looked at the peephole just to

make sure that it was Sevi. She gestured us a thumbs up before opening the

door.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!”

“Putang-” Sevi held his chest when he heard the confetti.

Yanna immediately went inside the bedroom when she heard Avi’s cry. Mukhang

nagising na nga nung nag-ingay kami. I laughed while they were putting a party

hat on Sevi’s head. He still looked so shocked.

“Sinong nagpauso nito, sasapakin ko!” Pagbabanta niya.

“Me,” I glared at him.

“Sasapakin ko ng halik!” He corrected.

“Just make a wish! Nangangawit na ‘ko!”

He closed his eyes and whispered something before blowing the candles. We

clapped and open the lights so we can finally see each other. I placed the

cake on the table so I could give Sevi a hug.

“Happy birthday,” I whispered before letting him go.

He gave everyone a hug. Lumiwanag ang mukha niya nang makitang lumabas si

Yanna sa kwarto, buhat si Avi na kakagising lang. I stared at her face,

smiling. She kind of looked like.. Uh.. Someone I know.. But I refused to talk

about it. Yanna probably had a reason and I respected that.

“Bebe!” Sevi went to Avi so he could carry her. The kid placed her head on

Sevi’s shoulder, trying to go back to sleep. I smiled while preparing the

food. “Bango naman!”

“Sobrang Tito mo naman, Sevi,” Yanna chuckled.

After a proper dinner, Sam brought out bottles of liquor. Everyone cheered

except me. I wasn’t used to drinking! May pasok din ako kinabukasan so hindi

ako pwedeng magpakalasing. I was still on my 4th glass when they finished

their 6th bottle.

“Hoy Luna, ano na?! Lasing ka na?” Kierra tried to hold Luna’s face. She was

already blushing.

“Ke,” she suddenly cried.

My eyes widened when I saw how hard she was crying. I looked at Sevi and our

eyes met. He looked so confused, too. He held my waist and pulled me closer to

him.

“Broken pa rin,” he whispered on me.

“Putangina, siya pa rin talaga,” Luna sobbed, covering her face.

“Oh god,” Sam sighed while pouring tequila on a shot glass.

“Hoy, ano ba ‘yan,” Kierra hugged her so she would calm down. “Hayaan mo na

‘yon. Sabi mo naka move on ka na, ah?!”

“Damn,” I whispered on Sevi. “She looked devastated.”

“Putangina talaga, ang sakit pa rin, e..” Luna whispered, holding her chest.

Yanna came out of the room after taking care of Avrielle. She stopped when she

saw Luna crying on the floor.

“Anak ng,” she scratched her head a little. “Bakit umiiyak na ‘yan?!”

I bit my lower lip, feeling terrible for her. I didn’t want to be like that. I

didn’t want to be hurt like that. Pakiramdam ko hindi ko kakayanin. Kapag nag-

break kami ni Sevi, baka hindi ko kayanin ‘yung sakit. I would probably cry

every night for the whole month.

“Don’t hurt me like that,” I whispered.

“Awayin ka nga hindi ko magawa, e,” he sighed.

We never had a big fight that would lead to a break up. We always communicate

it properly. Minsan nagtatampo siya adn minsan nagtatampo rin ako kapag hindi

kami masyadong nakakapag-usap but we always find a way to fix it. We really

can’t sleep without fixing a fight.

On my 7th term, I was accepted to become an intern in our own company,

together with Ida and other people. I didn’t know why I was so nervous on my

first official day. Maybe because sa Marketing Department ako naassign habang

si Ida ay sa Sales. Ayokong mag-isa! I want to cry.

I had to change my surname though, kapag tinatanong ako ng ibang employees

because I didn’t want a special treatment. I used my mom’s surname which was

Sarria. Ang nakakaalam lang siguro na anak ako ng may-ari ay ‘yung may hawak

ng papel ko. The one assigned to take care of the interns.

Inayos ko ang gamit ko sa maliit na cubicle na inassign sa’kin. Habang inaayos

ko, chineck ko ang phone ko because Sevi just texted.

From: Sevi

how’s first day babe?

I smiled while typing.

To: Sevi

So far so good I guess. Review ka lang dyan :)

He was busy reviewing for boards na so minsan na lang kami nagkikita, tapos

ngayong term intern pa ‘ko! It’s okay. We understand each other. This is part

of growing up.

“No texting at work!”

Napatalon ako sa gulat at muntik pang mahulog ang phone ko sa sahig nang

sumigaw ang isang employee. I looked at her nervously with my hands shaking.

“Intern?” She was a little old. Late 40s siguro.

I nodded, kinakabahan pa rin. Agad kong tinago ang phone ko sa bag at tumingin

ulit sa kanya. Oh gosh, I got so scared!

“Sarria,” she looked at my I.D. “Busy ka ba?”

“N-no, Ma’am,” I shook my head.

“Good. Can you get us coffee? Kapag first day ng intern, ganoon ang greeting

sa’min. With coffee. I guess you aren’t aware of that,” she gave me a

sarcastic smile.

“Y-yes, Ma’am.”

Nagmamadali kong kinuha ang wallet ko, cellphone, at maliit na notebook.

Maraming employees sa Marketing so pinili ko na lang bigyan ‘yung mga tao sa

side ko dahil sila naman ang madalas kong makakasama. I need to get along with

them!

I listed their orders before taking the elevator to buy coffee at the nearest

coffee shop. Tahimik lang akong nakasakay doon, hinihintay ang pagbaba. Nang

makarating ako sa coffee shop, I gave the cashier girl the list. Habang

hinihintay ko ang orders ko, sumandal muna ako sa counter.

My eyes widened when I saw a familiar face.

“Oh,” Sevi’s mom smiled at me when she saw me. “Elyse! Anong ginagawa mo

rito?”

“Hi po,” nagmano ako sa kanya. “I’m buying coffee for the employees.”

“Intern?” She looked at my I.D. “Saang department ka? Bakit ka naman

pinapabili ng kape?”

“Ugh.. Greeting daw po,” I sighed. “But it’s okay! Don’t tell my dad, please!”

I didn’t want to make it a big deal. Like I said, I didn’t want a special

treatment. I wanted it to be normal. I should learn the hard way before going

to the top.

When my name was called, I carried two drink holders and smiled at Sevi's mom

before going back to the company. I distributed the coffee per table, checking

their names on it. Pagkatapos, umupo na ulit ako sa cubicle ko para ayusin

ulit ang gamit ko. I wasn't done yet.

"Mali naman 'to, e! Ang sabi ko walang whipped cream!" An employee called my

attention.

"W-what?" I walked towards her in an instant. I checked my notebook. "You

didn't say that."

"I said that. Mas marunong ka pa?" She raised her brow at me.

"I.. I'll just.. get you another one-" I tried to take the cup back.

"Wag na! Bumalik ka na lang sa trabaho mo."

I wasn't used to being treated like this but I kept my mouth shut. Bumalik na

lang ako sa cubicle ko at inayos ang mga papel. Umupo na rin ako pagkatapos,

nakatitig sa computer. Hindi ko na alam ang gagawin ko. Wala pang ina-assign

sa'kin.

“Elyse,” Miss Alliah called me. She was the one handling the interns. “Your first assignment. Gawan mo ‘to ng PowerPoint and then present mo sa head mamaya. May meeting bukas, e.”

“Okay po,” I nodded.

“Just tell me if they’re treating you bad,” she whispered. “Or if they’re making you do something unethical. Alam mo naman ang mga bawal. I’m here to take care of you guys.”

I just smiled at her and shook my head. I didn’t want to make it a big deal, okay?! Even though they were mean. When she left, I started reading the file.

It was a new marketing proposal. My first task was too easy, huh. Sana hindi nila dinadalian dahil lang anak ako ng may-ari.

During lunch time, I went out to buy a fruit cup and went back to my seat, still working on the presentation. Since break time naman, I checked my phone and texted Sevi.

To: Sevi

They’re so mean :(

He replied so fast.

From: Sevi

aww bb :(sapakin natin

To: Sevi

It’s okay. I asked for this :(

First day pa lang naman. It will get better! I looked at the brighter side.

Maybe they were just trying to scare me or something. I know they will warm up

to me soon. Kung hindi, then what a toxic environment!

“Hello,” I looked at the woman who greeted me. “Ms. Garcia,” she offered her

hand.

She was tall and beautiful. I think she was already on her late twenties. She

looked professional and authoritative. Some employees looked away from her

when she arrived.

“Marketing head,” she explained. “I will assign you your future tasks in this

department specifically. Alliyah’s too busy roaming around so she couldn’t

attend to your needs 24/7.”

“E-Elyse,” I stood up and took her hand.

“I see. You’re working on our presentation tomorrow,” she looked at my

computer. “Well, then. Tomorrow, I want you to come up with a marketing plan.

Kahit draft lang basta pasok sa concept. Can you do that?” She smiled at me.

“Yes po,” I nodded.

“Good,” she looked back at the employee staring. Nang lumipat ang tingin niya

sa kape sa tables nila, tumikhim siya. “Did they ask you to buy them coffee?”

“Uh,” I couldn’t talk.

“What did I say?!” She yelled at the employees. Napatalon ako sa kinauupuan ko

sa gulat. “You are being paid enough salary just to what?! Ask the intern to

buy coffee for you?! How embarrassing!”

I shifted on my seat uncomfortably. No one talked. Everyone was just looking

down, natatakot sumagot. Some employees from the other side were looking,

nakikichismis sa nangyayari. Oh gosh, she looked nice but scary!

“Who asked her to buy coffee?! See me in my office!” Then she walked away.

Wow, what a nice working environment. Ang chaotic! Binalik ko na lang ulit ang

atensyon ko sa ginagawa ko. The concept was actually so nice. I spent the

night thinking about a nice suggestion. Wala na ring kumausap sa’kin

pagkatapos magalit ni Ms. Garcia. She was like a savior.

Hanggang 5 PM lang kami so inayos ko na ang gamit ko. Sevi and I will have

dinner tonight. Nagpaalam muna ako kay Ms. Garcia bago ako umalis. Kuya Roel

picked me up and drove me to an Italian restaurant. I was craving pasta.

Sevi was already there when I came. I pouted and made a sad face while walking

towards him. He immediately stood up and spread his arms to hug me. Sinandal

ko ang ulo ko sa dibdib niya habang yakap niya ‘ko nang mahigpit, hinahaplos

ang buhok ko.

“Bad day?” He asked.

“I’m sad,” I sighed. “Some people are just so mean.”

“Kawawa naman,” he hugged me tighter. “I-kain natin ‘yan, babe.”

Tumango ako at umupo na sa tapat niya. Malungkot din ako na hindi ako

makakapag-UAAP this year dahil sa internship. Okay lang dahil may next year pa

naman. Last year ko na ‘yon, though.

“Where are we going for our first anniversary?” I asked him while eating. “I

can make an excuse to my dad. I have work, though.. And.. Oh, you will take

your board exam.”

“Basta, susunduin kita non. Ako bahala,” he smiled at me.

“Oh, you have a surprise?” I was so excited kahit months away pa naman siya.

“I’m going to look forward to that.”

I had a hard time adjusting in the company. Good thing the employees started

treating me well, maybe because Ms. Garcia was always there, checking up on

me. Hindi naman sila mabait pero hindi na rin sila ganoon kasungit. When I ask

questions, they respond but they don’t really elaborate on it. Nahihiya na rin

ako magtanong dahil may ginagawa sila.

I celebrated my birthday with just a simple dinner with my family and friends.

I was too busy for a party. The next day, Sevi and I celebrated it together

with a simple date night in Tagaytay.

“Elyse, meeting. Halika, sasama ka sa’kin,” Ms. Garcia called me.

Nagmamadali akong tumayo at kinuha ang notebook ko pati ang cellphone bago

sumunod sa kanya. It was my first meeting with other departments including the

executives. When I entered the board room, I looked around in amazement. It

was much bigger than the room last time.

Umupo ako sa tabi ni Ms. Garcia, hawak-hawak ang notebook ko para mag-take

down ng notes. Everyone stood up when my dad entered the room. Napatayo rin

ako. Kasunod niya si Mommy and then ‘yung mom ni Sevi as the secretary.

When the meeting started, I focused myself on the projector screen in front.

Someone was presenting their proposal. Everyone was quiet and they waited for

the presentation to be over before asking questions. Ako ang kinakabahan para

sa nagpe-present! Everyone in the room looked professional.

“Like I said, the resort will cater-”

My eyes widened when my phone suddenly rang. Everyone in the room looked at me

while I was turning my phone off. Some looked pissed. I wanted to cry in

embarrassment!

“I’m so sorry, Sir,” Ms. Garcia apologized on my behalf.

“It’s okay. Continue,” my dad looked at the presenter.

Napanguso ako habang nakayuko, nahihiya na. When I looked up, my mom was

looking at me, trying to prevent a laugh. Halatang gusto niya ‘kong tawanan

pero hindi niya magawa dahil nasa meeting. I pouted and she smiled at me.

Pagkatapos ng meetingl, hiyang-hiya pa rin akong tumayo. Ms. Garcia went to me

and started scolding me about the phone. I bit my lower lip, nodding.

“Keep it easy, Garcia,” my mom said while fixing her things.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Ms. Garcia bowed a little.

“The intern’s so innocent,” mom laughed at me before leaving the room with my

dad.

Sumunod na rin ako kay Ms. Garcia palabas. Mabuti na lang at nakatakas na ‘ko

sa tingin ng ibang employees. Makakalimutan din nila ‘yun for sure!

“You’re lucky the Mr. Ledezma was in a good mood,” Ms. Garcia sighed. “Or else

lagot tayong dalawa.”

Weeks passed by normally. It was Friday when I planned to make a box of snacks

for Sevi. I went to the grocery to buy him food dahil exam niya na bukas. I

just want to keep him calm, hydrated, and healthy so he will do well. Gabi na

noong binisita ko siya sa library. He texted me that he will be there until

midnight.

Pagkapasok ko, I immediately saw him alone in a table for four. Marami siyang

papel at libro sa harapan niya. He was sleeping. Nakatulugan na niya ang

pagbabasa niya. I sighed and sat beside him.

“Baby, hey,” I tried to wake him up.

He opened his eyes and blinked twice when he saw me. Umayos kaagad siya ng upo

at tinignan ang binabasa niya. He muttered a curse and covered his face in

frustration.

“Hey, I’m sure you will do well,” I held his hand and squeezed it. “You need

to rest a little. Come here.”

Umusog ako at sinandal ang ulo niya sa balikat ko. I played with his hair

until his breathing came back to normal. He looked so stressed. Kawawa naman

siya. I was sure that he will pass in one take but I guess he didn’t trust

himself that much.

“Bakit ka nandito?” He asked and looked at me.

“Here,” I gave him a small pink box full of healthy snacks, juice, and water.

“I call this the Ely-mergency Kit.”

Kinuha niya ‘yon at binuksan. Lumiwanag ang mukha niya nang makita ang mga

pagkain sa loob. I included chocolates too so he will have more energy to

study! He sighed and gave me a tight hug.

“Kumusta araw mo?” He asked after kissing my cheek.

“It was tiring. The usual,” I pinched his cheek. “How about you? How are you?

Are you eating well? Are you hydrating yourself properly? Did you sleep last

night?”

“Oo, natulog ako,” he chuckled. “Oo, kumain din ako at uminom nang maraming

tubig. Naaalala ko lang kasi pinapaalala mo.”

I always text him to eat, drink water, and rest kapag may free time ako. I

understood how busy he was. Kahit ako, nakakalimutan ko na rin minsan kumain,

pero dahil iniisip ko palagi kung kumain na siya, naaalala kong ako rin pala

hindi pa kumakain.

“I love you,” I whispered on him.

“I love you,” he kissed my forehead.

He went back to studying after that and I waited for him to be finished. I was

just using my laptop the whole time, preparing for another presentation

tomorrow. I felt sleepy around 10 PM so I took a nap. Good thing the library

was open 24/7.

I woke up around midnight while Sevi was still studying. Umayos ako ng upo at

nahulog ang jacket sa balikat ko. Kinuha ko ‘yon at tumingin kay Sevi. Naka-

shirt na lang siya kahit malamig.

“It’s cold,” inabot ko sa kanya pabalik ang jacket niya. “Wear this.”

“Okay lang. Tapos na ‘ko. Uuwi na tayo,” he chuckled and closed his book.

I looked at my laptop in panic. I have a presentation tomorrow! My eyes

widened when I noticed that he finished designing my PowerPoint!

“What..” I whispered, scrolling through it. I just added the content earlier

and was planning to design it after but he.. he finished everything.

“Pangit ba?” Sevi asked, laughing at my face.

“No! I’m.. I’m just.. surprised,” I looked at it again. Damn, ang ganda ng

design. Parang professional. It was better than my last presentation. “It

looks so good. Thank you but you really didn’t have to-”

“Bukas na ‘yan, diba?” He cut me off. “Nakalagay sa date.”

“Yes! But-”

He gave me a soft kiss to shut me up. Gusto kong maiyak sa kanya. I felt like

a spoiled baby! I returned the favor by giving him a ride home.

“Good luck tomorrow,” I held his face. “You can do it. Rest well so you will

be relaxed tomorrow. I know you will do well!”

“Thank you,” he smiled. “Good luck sa presentation mo.”

“Fighting, Engineer Camero.”

I felt more nervous on his board exam than my presentation! Okay naman ang

presentation ko kinabukasan. I texted Sevi after that but he did not reply

because he was still taking the exam. We couldn’t see each other after that

because I had a dinner with my parents after work.

From: Sevi

tapos na first day!!!!!! wooo!!!!

I laughed and typed my reply.

To: Sevi

How did it go? Omg congrats!

From: Sevi

ang hirap :(huhu bb :(

To: Sevi

It’s fine! You did good! Good luck tomorrow! I’m here for you! Stay healthy

and hydrated, baby. Take a rest, okay? Do well! I love you.

After 6 days, the results came out! Sevi promised that he won’t look at the

results yet kapag hindi ako kasama. I was so excited to go to him after work.

I also prepared myself for the worse. I prepared some comfort food for him if

ever.. if ever lang na bagsak siya.

When I entered their house, I saw Sevi seated on the couch with his hands

together, looking at the floor nervously. May laptop sa coffee table at hindi

pa talaga niya tinitignan ang results. Steven was also there, curious.

“Ako na titingin!” Steven offered.

“Huwag. Bida bida ka dyan,” pambabara ni Sevi.

“Sige na, Kuya!”

“Hey,” I greeted after placing my bag on the table. “Game! Let’s do this!”

Kinuha ko ang laptop at sinearch kung saan makikita ang results.

“Wait lang, ayoko pa,” Sevi looked so nervous. I’ve never seen him like this!

“What do you mean? You waited the whole day for this. Let’s do this na!” I

convinced him.

“Ah, wait lang!” Pinigilan niya ang kamay ko. “Please, wait lang. Hindi ako

makahinga.”

“Babe!” I laughed and held his face. His hands were shaking already. “Don’t

worry. Whatever happens, we are all still proud of you. You can take the exam

again next time, okay? Let’s do this.”

Sevi stood up and walked away, covering his face nervously. I giggled while

scolling through the surnames. Nakatingin din si Steven. Wala pa ‘yung mommy

ni Sevi kaya kami-kami pa lang ang makakaalam.

1241 Camero, Sebastian Vincent

I covered my mouth in excitement when I saw his name! Oh my god!

“Kuya, wala pangalan mo rito,” Steven teased.

“H-huh?” Sevi looked back at us.

“It’s okay, love.. You can.. Uh.. Do better next time,” I gave him a sad

smile.

“Sabi na, e,” he sighed heavily.

Oh my gosh, he looked so sad! Pumunta siya sa kusina para kumuha ng tubig,

nanlulumo. I giggled and followed him in the kitchen, still holding the

laptop. He sighed again after drinking one glass of water.

“Wala, e. Bagsak,” he gave me a painful smile.

My lips slowly formed a smile and showed him the result. “Congratulations,

love!”

“Huh?” His expression changed while looking at the screen. “Oh shit, gago!

Gago! Ako ba ‘yan?!”

“Of course that’s you!” I was more excited than him.

“Holy shit!” He covered his mouth. “Steven, tantado ka, halika rito!” Sigaw

niya at pumunta sa living room.

Steven laughed so hard and ran upstairs so Sevi couldn’t chase him. Saktong

sakto dumating ‘yung mom ni Sevi. Her brows furrowed, wondering why her sons

were chasing each other.

“Ma, Engineer na ‘ko!” Sevi said proudly.

“Ha?!” His mom covered her mouth in surprise. “Hala, jusko, anak ko!

Congrats!” She ran towards Sevi to give him a tight hug. I started tearing up

when his mom started crying on his chest! Oh my gosh, it was so emotional.

“Ma, huwag ka nga umiyak,” Sevi laughed.

“Ang galing galing mo,” his mom was still crying.

“Ma, ano ba,” Sevi shook his head. “Ako lang ‘to.”

I laughed and smacked Sevi in the arm for teasing his mom. Nang bitawan siya

ng mama niya, binatukan din siya sa kalokohan niya. His mom asked me to stay

for dinner. She promised Sevi that she will cook a lot of food tonight so we

can celebrate.

The next day was our first anniversary. Ida helped me pick out a cute gift. It

was a clock using mathematical equations instead of simple numbers. It was

just for fun, actually. My real gift was a locket necklace with our picture on

it. It was small because I wanted to be lowkey.

I wore a maroon silk dress ending above my knees for our date night. I tied my

long straight hair in a high ponytail and also wore his necklace together with

a pair of diamond earrings. Good thing my dad was still at work. Tinext ko na

lang siya na may pupuntahan kami ni Ida.

“Bye Kuya Roel!” I waved at him before getting inside a Porsche. “Oh, wow.”

Umupo ako sa shotgun seat at sinara ang pinto. My mouth formed an ‘o’ when I

saw Sevi looking so fine in his dark red dress shirt folded to his elbows. He

fixed his hair, too! He looked so handsome in his semi-formal attire.

“Whose car is this?” I curiously asked him.

“Arkin,” he chuckled. “Huwag ka nang magtataka kapag may nakasunod na sa’ting

paparazzi.”

“What the hell!” I consciously looked at the side mirror.

“Joke lang. Van gamit noon. Hindi niya masyadong nilalabas ‘to,” he was

laughing at my reaction. “Ah, by the way..”

I automatically closed my eyes when he leaned for a kiss. I put my hand on his

cheek to deepen our kiss.

Tumigil din kami kaagad at nag-drive na siya paalis. It was my first time

seeing him drive! I didn’t even know that he could drive! He held my hand

while driving which made me smile like crazy. He looked so hot with his veins

showing on his other hand that was holding the steering wheel.

“Huwag mo ‘kong titigan,” Sevi chuckled.

I looked away and just stared in front, wondering where we were headed to.

Nakatulog na ata ako sa tagal. When I woke up, we were already parked outside

a.. park, I guess. Tinanggal ko ang seatbelt ko at lumabas na. Sevi held my

hand and made me follow him.

It was a forest park near the lake. Gabi na kaya bukas na ang fairy lights sa

trees. Oh, it was actually a restaurant. May wooden tables and chairs sa may

balcony. May mga taong kumakain din pero kaunti lang dahil gabi na.

“This is a hidden place,” I chuckled. “Was this in your list?”

“Oo naman,” he smirked. “Tamang research lang.”

It was like a peaceful picnic at night, only that we were provided tables and

chairs. Sevi ordered steak and wine for us.

“My treat,” he smirked.

“What? Why?” My brows furrowed.

“Celebration na rin ‘to ng board exam ko,” he said while pouring wine on my

glass.

Kinuha niya ang wine glass niya at tinaas sa’kin. “Happy anniversary! To more

years with you, love.”

“To more years with you,” I smiled.

:)

18

“Saang company ka next?”

I bit my lower lip while looking at the list of partner companies. For my 9th

term, magi-intern ulit kami for another company. I can’t choose my company

again. Mas maganda kung pipili ako ng iba para I’ll be exposed to different

kinds of environment.

“Valeria?” I smiled at Ida. “Sevi’s working there right now! Sa engineering

department.”

“Okay! Sundan kita!” Ida giggled.

After our last class for our 8th term, I asked Kuya Roel to drop me off

outside Sevi’s house. We will see each other tonight, kaso noong pumunta ako,

masyado pa ata akong maaga. Si Steven lang at si Sofia ang naroon and they

were watching a movie. 5 PM ang out ni Sevi pero matagal pa siyang

makakarating dito dahil nagcocommute pa.

“Steven,” I called his brother.

“Ate?” He looked back at me, waiting for me to say something.

“Anong gusto mo maging paglaki?” I was curious about that.

“Maging mayaman,” he simply answered.

“Why? What are your plans?” Wala akong makausap kung hindi siya.

“Bibilhan ko ng kotse si Mama tsaka si Kuya tapos papagawan ko ng malaking

bahay,” he answered while looking at the television screen.

“And who will build that house?” I raised a brow.

“E’di si Kuya rin,” he laughed.

“Don’t you want to become an engineer?”

“Gusto ko maging artista,” he smirked. “Pogi naman ako, e.”

I scoffed and shook my head. Hindi ko alam kung seryoso siya o nagbibiro lang

like his brother.

I stopped talking when the door opened and I saw Sevi looking so tired and

sweaty in his white polo shirt, black pants, and safety shoes. He was holding

a black bag, together with a hard hat. He closed the door and looked at me.

His expression suddenly changed from being tired to being happy.

“Hi,” he gave me a small smile and leaned to give my forehead a kiss.

He took his shoes off and walked upstairs to take a shower, I stalked him from

behind. Pumasok siya sa kwarto niya at pumasok din ako. Umupo ako sa kama niya

habang nilalapag niya ang mga gamit.

He took his polo shirt off and got a towel. I did not talk when he left the

room to take a shower. I waited patiently, actually getting lonely for seeing

him like this. Ever since he started working, he looked extra tired. I guess

dahil whole day siyang nagtatrabaho, either sa office or sa site, tapos

magcocommute pa siya pauwi.

He didn’t have money to buy a condominium yet, or a car, so tinitiis niya

munang mag-commute galing sa malayo. Ang hirap pa naman dahil rush hour daw

ang labas niya. Poor him.

“Tapos na exams mo?” Sevi entered the room again, looking fresh in his black

sweatshorts with nothing on top. May towel siyang nasa leeg at basa ang buhok.

“Come here, baby,” I reached out my hand.

He sighed and sat beside me, intertwining our hands together. I gave him a

tight hug sideways to give him comfort. He hugged me back with one hand,

kissing the top of my head.

“How’s work?” I asked again.

“Ang higpit ng head namin sa department,” he chuckled. “Lalo na sa mga bagong

salta katulad ko. Pahirapan talaga makapunta sa tuktok, e, pero okay lang.

Trust the process.”

“Yes,” I nodded. “Of course you should start from the ground. Don’t worry, I

know that it will all be worth it in the end.”

“Ikaw? Kumusta?”

“I’m fine,” I placed my head on his shoulder. “For our next term, intern ulit

kami sa.. isang partner company..”

“Oh?” Napatingin siya sa’kin, nakangiti. “Saan ka naman?”

“U-uh,” umayos ako ng upo. “Valeria.. Is it.. okay with you?”

He looked at me for a moment before smiling. “Oo naman. Malaking kumpanya

‘yon. Magandang experience tapos pwede pa tayong magkita paminsan-minsan.”

I gave him a soft kiss until our kiss became passionate. We stopped

immediately because we heard his mom downstairs. Bumaba rin ako kaagad at

pinanood ‘yung Mama niya magluto. She was actually willing to teach me.

We had a break after term but I spent that in U.S. with my mom. She had to

meet some doctors there and I had to come with her because my dad couldn’t.

“Where are you going?” My mom asked when she saw me getting ready to go out.

“Kakauwi lang natin sa hotel, aalis ka na ulit?”

“I’m meeting with some friends, Mommy,” I gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You

have your personal nurse right there, or you can give me a call. I’ll be

back!”

Kinuha ko na ang bag ko at bumaba sa hotel para maglakad sa pizza restaurant

in New York. It was a little cold so I wore my floral Gucci jacket on my way

there. Pagkapasok ko sa restaurant, ngumiti kaagad ako at kumaway kila Ate

Helen.

“Hey hey!”

Lumapit ako sa table at niyakap si Ate Helen at Ate Ericka. I looked at Hiro and gave him a hug, too. He went all the way from Florida to here, huh. He looked a little different now. I just couldn’t look at him that long because I felt guilty.

“How are you guys?” I asked, smiling. “Hiro? How are you?”

“I’m fine,” he chuckled, playing with his wine glass. “Much better now.”

“Okay. That’s.. good.” I bit my lower lip and looked away. I was trying to stop myself from talking. Baka kung ano pa ang masabi ko!

Avi turned one last January. Hindi ako nakapunta sa celebration dahil busy ako, so the last time I saw Sevi’s friends was during his birthday last year.

I still see Sam, though, kapag may events pero madalang na sila Luna, Yanna,

and his other friends. Yanna became busy with her flight attendant thing.. and

here I had Hiro in front of me.. busy with his flying career.

“Malapit ka na pala grumaduate, Ely!” Good thing Ate Helen talked.

“Oo nga, sayang hindi kami makakapunta,” Ate Ericka pouted.

“It’s okay, it’s okay!” I laughed awkwardly. “I couldn’t attend your graduation din naman!”

I couldn’t stay long because I had to take care of my mom so after eating and paying for the pizza, I already went back to the hotel. I was also feeling too guilty about Hiro. Kapag nag-stay pa ‘ko, baka kung ano na ang masabi ko.

We went back to the Philippines the next day so I could take care of my internship. A week after that, I started my first day in Valeria Group. Hawak-hawak ko ang isang box habang hinahatid ako ni Miss Iya sa cubicle ko. She was the one in charge of the interns here. I was assigned to work in Finance this time.

“You’re good here, Ms. Ledezma?” She smiled at me.

“Y-yes po,” I nodded and placed my box on the cubicle.

“Call me when you need anything. The head of Finance will talk to you after his meeting,” and then she walked away.

I smiled at myself and started fixing my things on the table. I really really hoped that I would get a better working environment than last time. I heard people in Valeria Group were more.. chill? Sana nga! I wanted to make friends!

Not really friends, but I wanted to get along with others. Mahirap magtrabaho

kapag feeling mo mag-isa ka lang.

After fixing my things, I tried opening the computer but I didn’t know how. I

looked at the woman behind me and tried to ask for help. I was so scared!

“Uhm.. Hi,” I tried to get her attention.

She stopped typing and looked at me, surprised by my sudden call. She suddenly

stood up and smiled at me. She looked young but definitely older than me.

“Hi! Clarisse!” She offered her hand. “You need help?”

“Uhm, Elyse,” I took her hand. “Yes, I don’t know how to open the computer?”

“Oh, right!”

She put her phone down and went to my cubicle to find the plug. My mouth

formed an ‘o’ when I realized how dumb I was. Good thing she was patient and

willing to help! She plugged the computer and clicked something before

standing up again.

“Intern?” She asked, smiling.

“Yes, sorry, that was dumb,” I chuckled.

“No, it’s okay. I was also like that on my first day,” she laughed. “Enjoy

your stay!”

She went back to her seat so I also went back to mine. I was browsing at some

files while waiting for my first assignment.

“Ledezma?”

Napatayo kaagad ako at lumingon sa lalaking tumawag sa’kin. He was wearing a

blue polo shirt and black slacks. He was also wearing specs. I glanced at his

I.D. to know his name but he already offered his hand.

“Mel,” he introduced himself. “Finance Head.”

“Elyse Ledezma,” I took his hand nervously.

“Ledezma,” he looked up, thinking about my surname. “Anyway, to welcome you

here, I have some files for you to check.”

Inabot niya sa’kin ang makapal na envelope. Tinanggap ko kaagad ‘yon at

niyakap dahil mabigat.

“Finish that by tomorrow. You can see me in my office,” he pointed at the

white door. “Alright? Alright?”

Mabilis akong tumango sa kanya. Nang maglakad na siya paalis, bumalik na ‘ko

sa upuan ko para basahin ang nasa loob ng envelope. When I saw numbers, I

immediately massaged my head.

I sighed heavily before working at the computations. It was actually easy pero

marami siya so I spent the whole morning working on it. I noticed that it was

already lunch time when everyone started to leave. Unti-unti nang nauubos ang

tao sa side namin.

“Elyse, hindi ka maglu-lunch?” Clarisse looked at me, dala-dala na ang blazer

niya.

“Uh, I will!” Sinave ko kaagad ang file at kinuha ang bag ko.

“We have a cafeteria at the 6th floor,” she informed me. “Food’s good and

free. You want to come with me?”

“Sure, sure.”

Sumunod ako sa kanya hanggang sa makasakay na kami sa elevator. I texted Sevi

that I’ll be at the cafeteria for lunch. Nang bumukas ang elevator, narinig ko

kaagad ang ingay ng mga tao sa cafeteria. Lunch time kaya ang daming tao.

Malaki naman siya at maraming tables kaya nakahanap kami kaagad ni Clarisse.

She sat with some employees that she knew and then she introduced me to them.

“Ledezma?” The woman asked. “Are you perhaps related to the owner of Ledezma

Group?”

“What?” I blinked twice, not knowing what to say. “Yeah, but.. Uhm.. We’re not

direct relatives. Malayo,” I lied.

“Really?!” The other employee looked excited. “‘Yun ‘yung may-ari ng mga hotel

at resort, diba?”

I did not talk and just listened to them. They were talking about our company

but not in a bad way so it was fine for me. Hindi na lang ako nagsalita at

tahimik na kumain.

My brows furrowed when I saw Sevi holding a tray while talking to a familiar

woman. Kinuha ko kaagad ang phone ko at tinawagan siya, pero hindi niya hawak

ang phone niya.

“Wait lang,” sabi ko sa kanila at tumayo.

Sevi placed the tray on the table and sat in front of the gorgeous woman. Oh,

naaalala ko na! She was the NU cheerleader! What was her name again? Bianca?

I walked towards their table and stopped in front of Sevi. His eyes widened

when he saw me glaring at him.

“Babe!” Tumayo siya kaagad at ngumiti. “Kanina ka pa rito?”

“Yeah, I texted you but you did not reply,” madiing sabi ko sa kanya ngunit

pabulong para hindi marinig ng iba.

“Huh?” Kinapa niya ang bulsa niya at nanlaki ang mata. “Shoot! Naiwan ko phone

ko sa office.”

I glanced at the woman and raised a brow. She gave me a teasing smile after

drinking water.

“Ah, Ely, si Engineer Bianca Ramos,” Sevi introduced her to me. “Nagkita na

kayo sa UAAP noon. Partner ko siya sa isang project kaya kasama ko siya

ngayon.”

“Hi,” the woman stood up and offered her hand. “Engineer Ramos.”

“Hi,” I gave her a fake smile after shaking her hand lightly. Lumingon ako kay

Sevi, masama pa rin ang tingin. “Okay, then. I’ll go back to my table na.”

I waved at him before walking away. Umupo ulit ako sa table namin at nawalan

na ng gana sa kinakain kaya niligpit ko na. I jumped on my seat when I

suddenly saw Ida in front of me.

“Sabi mo sabay tayo!” Nagtatampo na sabi niya.

“What the hell!” Binaba ko ulit ang tray sa table at tumayo. “I was calling

you pero hindi mo sinasagot!”

“Oh, I was in a meeting,” she chuckled. “Anyway, tapos na ‘ko kumain. Let’s

grab a coffee.”

Nagpaalam ako kay Clarisse at binalik ang tray bago kami naglakad paalis ni

Ida. We went to a coffee shop and ordered two cups for us. I was still pissed

about what happened earlier but I didn’t want to make it a big deal!

“I saw your jowa with a woman,” Ida laughed.

“Yeah,” I rolled my eyes.

“I asked some employees and sabi nila palagi naman daw magkasama ‘yung dalawa

pero.. Pero may kasama silang iba, okay? Ngayon lang sila naiwang dalawa so

don’t worry about it!” Ida gave me a smile.

“Yeah, whatever.”

I was still pissed about him not replying to my texts kahit valid naman na

naiwan niya ang phone niya sa office. I’ll just keep this anger inside me. It

will fade. It shouldn’t even be a big deal. He needed to work.

Natapos ko na ang pinapagawa sa’kin around 4 PM so I started fixing my things.

Sevi kept on texting me while I was working but I refused to reply. I didn't

want him to interrupt me while I was working.

"Sir," I knocked on the door before going in.

"Oh, Miss Ledezma," sumandal si Sir Mel sa upuan niya at tumingin sa orasan.

"I just finished checking the files," I placed a flashdrive on his table,

together with the envelope.

"Oh, okay," kinuha niya ang flashdrive. "I'll give you a feedback tomorrow.

You can go home now."

"Thank you, Sir."

Bumalik na 'ko sa cubicle ko at kinuha ang gamit ko. Tumatawag si Sevi kaya

sinagot ko habang naglalakad papunta sa elevator.

"What?" I answered the call.

[Uuwi ka na?]

"Yes."

[Usap muna tayo. Hintayin kita sa parking.]

Sumimangot ako at pinatay na ang tawag bago pumasok ng elevator. Pinindot ko

ang parking. Nang bumaba ako, naroon na si Sevi nakasandal sa kotse namin,

kausap si Kuya Roel. I rolled my eyes before walking towards their direction.

Kuya Roel opened the door and went inside the car when he saw me, just to give

us a little bit of privacy. Huminto ako sa tapat ni Sevi at tiningala siya,

naghahamon. He sighed and held my waist to pull me closer.

“Galit ka?” He asked softly.

“No, I’m just pissed,” I pushed him lightly so he would let go of me.

Nakakahiya kay Kuya Roel!

“Ganoon din ‘yon, e,” he let go of my waist but he held my hand. “I’m sorry.

Hindi ko napansin na naiwan ko ‘yung phone ko sa office.”

“Yeah, hindi ka nagrereply and then I’ll see you laughing with that woman,”

mabilis na sabi ko. “Ang saya saya mo pa! Ang saya saya mo pa!” I pointed at

his face.

“Ha?! Hatdog! Hindi kaya ako masaya!” He denied.

“You were laughing,” I raised a brow.

“Hindi ako tumatawa noon,” he was still trying to deny it!

“Really? I saw you laughing.”

“Hindi, ah.. Ano lang ‘yon..”

“Ano?” Paghahamon ko.

“Minamassage ko lang ‘yung panga ko, babe,” he held his jaw.

I couldn’t help but laugh! Nakakainis!

“Anong minamassage?!” I hit him on his chest.

“Nakakangawit kasi kung poker face lang ako palagi kaya diba kapag tumatawa,

namamassage ‘yung muscles ko rito,” he pointed at his jaw.

I bit the insides of my cheek to stop myself from laughing. Seryoso pa talaga

siyang nagpapaliwanag!

“Uy, tumawa na siya. Hindi na siya galit,” he smirked.

Damn, he was so annoying! Palagi na lang kapag galit ako, magpapatawa siya

tapos nawawala kaagad galit ko! He really knew how to fix the situation.

“Don’t do that again. Bring your phone with you,” I glared at him.

“Opo,” he nodded. “Hug na.”

I rolled my eyes and gave him a hug. He put his arms around me and kissed the

top of my head before letting me go.

“Sige na, uwi ka na. Text ka, ah,” he reminded me.

Tumango ako at pumasok na sa kotse. Kuya Roel said nothing about our little

love quarrel. Mabuti na lang at wala siyang pakialam.

The next day, I had lunch with Ida because Sevi was in a meeting kaya late daw

sila maglu-lunch. Pagkabalik ko sa cubicle ko, may iniwan ulit na files si Sir

so I worked on it. I only stopped when I received a text from Sevi.

From: Sevi

having lunch :) how’s work bebi?

To: Sevi

Me tired :(

From: Sevi

2nd day pa lang ah? hahaha pahinga babe. drink water.

Hindi ako nakapagreply dahil dumaan si Sir Mel kaya pinagpatuloy ko na lang

ang ginagawa ko sa monitor. Pagkatapos, tumayo ako para magpa-photocopy. I

actually got lost a few times so it took me a while. Clarisse helped me with

the machine when she saw me struggling.

“Thank you,” I smiled and went back to my cubicle.

My brows furrowed when I saw a bottle of water on my desk and a chocolate bar.

I bit my lower lip to prevent a smile when I read the note attached to it.

‘Continue working hard. Alabyu. – Engr. Camero’

How the hell did he find my table?! Ayun tuloy, I was smiling the whole

afternoon. Inayos ko na ang gamit ko before 5 PM at bumaba na sa engineering

department para lang silipin kung anong nangyayari roon.

I looked around, smiling, but my smile suddenly faded when I saw Sevi standing

there with another engineer. Both of them were looking down on the floor

habang pinapagalitan sila nung matanda.

“Anong materials ba ang ginamit niyo?! Ano ba naman ‘yan! Ang bobo lang!”

Padabog na binagsak nung matanda ‘yung folder sa sahig. “Ang kukupad niyo

kasi!”

“I’m sorry, Sir,” I heard Sevi’s voice.

“Kumilos kasi kayo! Kapag sinabi kong pumunta kayo sa site at gawin niyo ‘yung

ganito, huwag kayong uuwi hangga’t hindi niyo nagagawa!”

“Sir, umulan po kaya tinigil ‘yung-”

“Sige, sumagot ka pa!”

“Sorry, Sir,” Sevi pursed his lips.

I bit my lower lip and walked away. Hinintay ko na lang siya sa lobby,

pretending that I didn’t see anything.

I waited for a few more minutes before I saw Sevi walking towards me, holding

a folder in his hand. I stood up and gave him a small smile.

“Tara, kain!” He gave me a smile.

That smile was so convincing.. kung hindi ko lang alam ang nangyari kanina.

Ganito ba siya palagi kapag nakikita ko siya? I always thought that he was

doing fine because he was always smiling.

“Are you okay?” I held his face.

“Oo naman,” he chuckled.

“I love you,” I whispered. “I’m proud of you.”

“I love you,” he kissed my forehead.

Ever since that day, I was always wondering if he was getting scolded every

day. Kapag nagkikita kami at the end of the day, palagi naman siyang nakangiti

like everything’s fine. When I asked him about it, he said that it was part of

the learning process. I accepted that.

He didn’t celebrate his birthday this year because of work. Simple dinner lang

daw ang gusto niya kasama ako at family niya so we did that. For my 10th term,

I went back to class and started training for the cheerdance this year.

“Happy birthday, Eli!” Sevi kissed my cheek. Nagulat ako!

“What the hell, akala ko kung sino! Sasampalin ko na sana!” Reklamo ko.

It was already 11 PM, kakatapos lang ng training. Wala nang bukas na

restaurant kaya nasa fastfood ulit kami, celebrating my birthday kahit bukas

pa. He wanted to wait until 12 AM.

“May regalo ako,” he smirked and placed his iPad in front of me.

“What? You’re giving me your iPad?” My brows furrowed.

“Hindi, tangek,” he laughed. “Wait lang kasi.”

He played a video of our moments together. At first it was sweet but my blood

started to boil when he put a slideshow of my ugliest pictures! Tumawa siya at

agad na tumayo nang abutin ko siya.

“I fucking hate you!” Hinatak ko siya sa sleeve at hinampas.

He literally made me a damn meme! Nag-effort pa talaga siyang mag-edit just to

make fun of me. Gosh, says a lot about our relationship!

“Don’t ever post that,” I warned him.

“Hindi naman ako pala-post,” he rolled his eyes.

Hindi na rin ako masyadong nagso-social media. I got too much on my plate and

he was also busy with work. I felt like it was a part of growing up. Nawawalan

na rin ng time sa mga ganoong bagay.

Sevi couldn’t come to the day of our competition because according to him, may

pupuntahan daw silang site. I felt sad but of course I understood his reason.

Nakakalungkot lang dahil last competition ko na ‘to.

We did a better routine this time. While I was standing on top of my

teammate’s shoulders for our final stunt, I suddenly saw a green cartolina

being waved.

‘UM-ELYSE NA KAYO!

PANALO NA ‘TO! (sa puxoh q)’

My lips slowly formed a smile before jumping in the air. Pagkasalo sa’kin,

tumayo na kami at nag-bow. It was the end of our routine. I was so so happy

that we did good, but my happiness really came from seeing that banner being

waved by the man I love.

Kinuha ko kaagad ang phone ko.

From: Sevi

good job baby!!!!! so proud!!!! aaaaaa!!!!

I bit my lower lip, smiling.

To: Sevi

Scam ka rin! You said hindi ka makakapunta!

From: Sevi

surfries xD

I couldn’t wait to see him after the competition. We still did not win but I still felt happy. It was not about winning anymore. It was about being supported by the people who were special to you.

I smiled when I saw Sevi waiting for me. Tumakbo kaagad ako sa kanya at niyakap siya. He wrapped his arms around my waist so we wouldn’t fall.

“Ang saya, ah,” he laughed. “Parang nanalo, ah.”

“I’m just happy,” I giggled and hugged him tighter.

“Sabagay, panalo ka sa’kin, e.” I could hear him smirking.
“Congratulations,

love.”

We ate in a Japanese restaurant after that so we could celebrate my team’s loss. He never failed to make me smile. Nakalimutan ko na yatang natalo kami

dahil sa kanya.

“Ano sa Japanese ang wait?” He asked.

“Chotto matte?” I answered.

“Amp, corny mo naman. Dapat hindi mo sinagot. Dapat tinanong mo kung ano!”

Reklamo niya.

“You were asking me!” Inis na sabi ko.

“Hindi kita tinatanong talaga, magjo-joke dapat ako!”

“Okay, what’s the joke?” I glared at him.

“‘De, wala na. Nawala na ‘ko sa mood,” he sighed heavily.

What the hell! Napakaarte talaga nito!

“Ano nga?!” Pikon na sabi ko. “Ano sa Japanese ang wait?!”

“Chotto matte,” he mocked me.

“You know what? You’re paying for our dinner,” I crossed my arms, still

glaring at him.

“O, sige, eto na,” he chuckled. “Tanungin mo na ‘ko.”

“Ano sa Japanese ang wait?”

“Hentai,” he smirked.

“Baboy!” Binato ko sa kanya ang table napkin.

“Ouch,” he held his chest dramatically.

I went home around 8 PM and was surprised to see my dad on the couch. Usually,

wala pa siya around 8 PM.

“Good evening, Dad,” I gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“Good evening, love,” he greeted back.

I was about to go upstairs but I stopped when I thought about something.

Naglakad ako palapit sa kanya at umupo sa tabi niya. He was watching the news.

“Dad,” I called.

“Yes?” He asked without looking at me.

“Uhm, I want to talk to you about something.”

He lowered the volume of the television and looked at me, waiting for me to

say something. I shifted on my seat uncomfortably and played with my hands.

“What.. would you feel if..” I bit my lower lip. “If.. I.. Like.. Get a

boyfriend or something?”

“Or something?” He repeated and chuckled.

“A boyfriend. What if.. I have a boyfriend right now?” I made my question

clear.

“Do you have a boyfriend?” Seryosong tanong niya sa’kin.

“Well,” I licked my lower lip, not knowing what to say. “I mean, I’m-”

“Do you have a boyfriend?” He asked again in a more serious tone.

“No!” I denied immediately, getting scared of his reaction.

His brows furrowed and looked at the television again. I was about to stand up

and go back to my room but he suddenly talked.

“Can I see your grades, Eli?”

“Y-yes, Dad.”

Bumalik ako sa kinauupuan ko at kinuha ang phone ko para ipakita sa kanya ang

grades ko sa past semesters. Stable naman. I was confident about it.

He looked at it with no reaction. Binawi ko ang phone ko nang matapos na

niyang tignan. I was so nervous! Hindi ko mabasa ang iniisip niya!

“You don’t have a boyfriend?” He asked again.

“I.. I don’t, Dad,” I looked down.

“Why?”

My eyes widened and looked at him, confused.

“W-what?” I blinked twice.

“Bakit wala kang boyfriend?” He asked. “Are you waiting for me to arrange your

marriage to another rich man?”

“A-are you going to?” My heart was beating so fast.

“If you still don’t have a boyfriend, then I will-”

“I have a boyfriend!” Mabilis na sagot ko.

Napatingin siya sa’kin at tumaas ang kilay. Mariin kong pinikit ang mga mata

ko, accepting my fate. Gosh, that was so impulsive!

“What?” My dad asked.

“I.. have a boyfriend,” I sighed after admitting it.

“Okay,” he nodded and turned the volume of the television back to normal.

“What do you mean ‘okay’?” My brows furrowed.

“You’re young, Elyse,” he said. “You always like doing what you want.”

“Won’t you ask who he is?”

“Never introduce someone to your family unless you’re really really sure about

the person,” he advised.

But I was.

I was sure that I would spend the rest of my life with him.

Sevi was like my other half. I was at my best when I was with him. We already

made so many plans together. I was ready to risk it for him.

“Happy 2nd anniversary!” I jumped and gave Sevi a hug while we were in the

pool.

Good thing my parents were in a business trip so we had the chance to

celebrate our 2nd anniversary in my house. Sevi hugged me back and placed me

at the side of the pool. I leaned to give him a soft kiss.

“Happy 2nd anniversary,” bati niya pabalik. “Dalawang taon na kitang tinitiis.

Akalain mo ‘yon?!”

“Excuse me, ako ang lugi,” I rolled my eyes.

After taking a shower, we ended up making out inside my room again. I laughed

when he fell on the bed. Umakyat ako sa taas niya at hinawakan ang kamay niya.

He placed his hand on the side of my neck and pulled me closer for another

kiss.

I moaned when he pulled on the hem of my shirt and took it off me. My face

heated when I realized that I was only left in my black bra. He kissed me

again and pushed his tongue inside me while his hand was on my chest,

massaging my mound through my underwear.

I moaned when he put his hand inside my bra and played with my mounds using

his fingers. He stopped touching me so he could push me off the top. Humiga

ako sa kama at siya naman ang pumunta sa taas ko.

He stared at me for a moment, thinking if he should continue or not. I rolled

my eyes at him and held his hand.

“Come on, please,” I begged.

He started kissing my neck while taking my strap off. I bit my lower lip and played with his hair. I covered my mouth to stifle a moan when he started sucking on my breasts. He left a mark on top of it and kissed me again.

“Uwi na ‘ko,” he whispered and stood up, laughing.

“Ugh! I hate you!” Binato ko siya ng unan.

For my 11th term, I was again an intern in Ida’s family company. The last term made me so busy that Sevi and I would only see each other twice a month. I couldn’t wait to live with him so we would see each other every night kahit gaano ka-busy. At least we’ll still have time for each other.

“Ledezma, Amora Elyse.”

I went to the stage to get my diploma, smiling. I wanted to cry when I received an award. I dedicated everything to my family and to Sevi. He helped me get through everything. No matter how busy he was, he still had time to help me study.

“I’m so proud, anak,” my mom hugged me after the ceremony.

I texted Sevi to meet me outside. My dad gave me a bouquet of flowers to congratulate me. I gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“You’re finally going to help in the company,” my dad tapped my arm. “I’m so

proud of you.”

My brother couldn’t go because he refused to be on the same place as my dad.

He hated him that much, but he promised that he will visit me later to give

his graduation gift.

“Hey,” I heard a man behind me.

Lumingon kaagad ako kay Sevi. He was wearing a white dress shirt and black

slacks. He looked so formal.

“Oh, Engineer Camero,” my dad smiled at him and offered his hand.

“Hello, Sir,” Sevi smiled at my dad after shaking his hand.

“Long time no see! What brings you here?”

“Uh, Dad,” sumingit ako sa gitna nilang dalawa.

My dad looked at me and raised his brows when he noticed my hand on Sevi’s

arm. Sevi felt awkward and he wanted me to let go but I just pulled him

closer.

“This is my boyfriend,” I introduced.

:)

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Warning: R-18.

“Your what?”

“My boyfriend, Dad.”

I pursed my lips and looked at my dad again, waiting for his reaction. Sevi glanced at me nervously, still trying to pull my hand away from holding his arm because he felt awkward. Binitawan ko siya at ngumiti kay Daddy. My mom was looking away, saying nothing.

“I.. didn’t know,” my dad was still in shock. “Sevi, is that true?”

“Yes, Sir. I’m sorry,” Sevi bowed down a little, getting embarrassed for not telling my dad for 2 years.

“No, I’m.. I’m just.. Wow,” my dad couldn’t find the words to say.

“Why don’t we continue this at the restaurant? Sayang ang reservation ko,” my mom cut the conversation off.

My dad nodded and went to the car. Sumakay din si Sevi kasama ako. Walang nagsasalita sa amin habang papunta sa restaurant. I didn’t know what to feel.

I felt free.. but still nervous about what will happen. At least he did not make any violent reaction!

Nang makapasok kami sa restaurant, dinala kaagad kami ng waiter sa V.I.P room.

Sevi sat beside me, right in front of my dad. Si Mommy naman ang nasa tapat

ko. No one was talking after the waiter left to process our order.

“Dad,” I called.

He looked at me like I just interrupted his deep thinking. Kanina pa siya

nakatulala sa may lamesa, nag-iisip.

“I’m sorry, hija, I was just.. surprised,” he looked at Sevi again. “I’m

sorry, Engineer Camero. I don’t know what to say.”

“Okay lang po,” Sevi shifted on his seat uncomfortably. “Kasalanan ko pong

hindi namin nasabi sa inyo kaagad.”

“What are you talking about?” I lightly pinched his waist. “It was my fault,

Dad. I asked him to wait until my graduation.”

“So matagal na kayo?” My dad raised a brow. “At hindi ko alam? Paanong hindi

ko alam?”

“You’re busy with work, dear,” my mom sipped on her tea.

“Wait, so you knew?” His brows furrowed.

Muntik nang masamid si Mommy sa iniinom niyang tsaa. She still gracefully put

the teacup down and wiped her mouth while nodding. My dad looked at me again

like he was accusing me of a crime.

“I’m firing your driver,” Dad said in a stern voice.

“What?!” My eyes widened.

“Alfred!” My mom glared at him, getting pissed now.

“I told him to report to me. I guess he wasn’t doing his best in his job, huh?

I trusted that guy,” my dad got his phone out and dialed a number.

“Dad, no!” I wanted to cry.

“Roel, can I speak to you after-”

“He didn’t know, Dad! It was my fault! Please, don’t do this. I’ll pay for his

salary! Sell my bags! My clothes! Please,” I was so desperate.

My dad ended the call immediately and looked at me, raising a brow. Sevi

pursed his lips and held my hand under the table to calm me down.

“I told Roel not to report to you,” my mom saved me again. “I didn’t want to

stress you out. Roel reported everything to me. Elyse wasn’t doing anything

bad.”

“I’m sorry, Engineer Camero, you had to witness this.. little family quarrel,”

my dad looked at Sevi, embarrassed. “Elyse, you’re grounded.”

“What?!” My jaw dropped.

“You sneaked out a lot of times, huh?” My dad glared at me. “Since you’re

already going to start working in the company, I guess I can confiscate my

cards now. You need to learn how to live with your starting salary.”

“Alfred,” my mom wanted to stop him.

“No, Mommy, it’s fine,” I assured her.

Gulat na napalingon sa’kin si Sevi habang kinukuha ko ang wallet ko. I opened

it and placed three cards on the table, giving them back to my dad. He was

right. I should stop depending on him. Magtatrabaho na ‘ko so I should learn

how to live with my salary.

“You’ll stay in the house for a year until you finally earn enough money to

buy or rent a condominium unit,” my dad laid down his plans.

“Oh, Dad, Sevi and I are planning to live-”

“Elyse,” Sevi cut me off nervously.

“A year, Eli,” my dad repeated. “Is that okay, Engineer Camero?”

“Of course.. Sir,” Sevi nodded.

“I will let you live in my house, not paying the bills and groceries, for one

whole year, and then you can do what you want, but remember that you need to

earn your position in the company. You’re not going straight to the top,” my

dad started talking about business.

I knew Sevi felt overwhelmed about everything. He was quiet while my dad was

lecturing me about the inheritance of the company. I nodded, accepting

everything in his plan.

My mom looked at me in worry. “Eli, if you need help-”

“Let her work hard for it, hon,” my dad cut her off. “She can’t run the

company without knowing the basics. She needs to get through it.”

“I know, Dad.”

Sevi also started from the ground. It would be so unfair for me to go straight

to the top. Like what he said, it was part of the learning process and I

should trust that process like what he did. It will all be worth it in the

end.

I will do well. I was determined to do well.

The only thing I skipped was the interview. A week after my graduation, I

already went to work. I didn’t want to waste time anymore. I needed money.

Soon, it will be enough for Sevi and I. Hindi pwedeng si Sevi lang ang

magbabayad kapag tumira na kami sa iisang unit. We need to do it half-half. I

wanted to contribute to it.

He was my motivation to do well.

“I think our staycation will be delayed,” I laughed while holding my iPad. I was facetiming with Sevi since we couldn’t see each other tonight.

“Oo. Pareho tayong walang pera,” he joked.

He was saving money for a lot of things. He wanted a car, and a unit for us, and of course for the furnitures in that unit. He was also going to pay for Sofia’s tuition in a private elementary school. ‘Yung mom niya, maraming utang kaya kahit malaki sahod niya sa company namin, nauubos din kaagad. His mom would pay for all the bills, groceries, and Steven’s college tuition.

“How’s Steven in Adamson?” I asked.

“Okay naman. Nagseseryoso na nang kaunti,” Sevi shook his head. “Hanggang ngayon, sa’kin pa pinapagawa assignment. Mahahampas ko na ‘yon, e.”

“Ano nanaman!” Rinig kong reklamo ni Steven sa background.

“Ang sabi ko napakatalino mo,” Sevi rolled his eyes. “Sa sobrang talino mo, mas marunong ka pa sa prof mo kaya ka binagsak.”

“Tama naman kasi sagot ko, e,” sumilip si Steven sa camera. “Silang lahat ‘yung mali. Ako ‘yung tama.”

“Oo, tatamaan ka rin sa’kin. Doon ka nga!” Tinulak siya ni Sevi paalis.

The next day, I woke up early to go to work. I was wearing a black pencil

skirt and a white blouse, my typical corporate attire. My long straight hair

was in a ponytail to look clean and formal. I was going to present a marketing

proposal today.

“Good morning, Elyse,” Ms. Garcia greeted me.

I was still using my mom’s name. I didn’t want to brag my surname. That would

just make things easier for me. I wanted them to treat me like a normal

employee, or else I won’t learn.

“Ready?” She asked before going inside the board room.

“Yes, Ma’am,” I smiled nervously, carrying the folders.

We went inside the board room and I started distributing the folders per

chair. I also checked our file and the projector screen. Everything was

normal. I started getting more nervous when I saw people entering the room.

The most important thing for these people was their time so I made sure I

wouldn’t waste it. Marami pang gagawin ang mga tao sa harapan ko.

Everyone stood up when my mom and dad entered the room. Sevi’s mom smiled at

me and gave me a thumbs up before taking her seat. I refused to look at my

parents. Hindi naman ako kinakabahan sa presensya nila. Mas kinakabahan pa ‘ko

sa iba.

I started my presentation. Everyone was listening while browsing on the

folders placed in front of them. At the end of my presentation, I acknowledged

all the questions. I managed to answer all of them properly with the help of

Ms. Garcia.

“I like the idea,” my mom nodded. “It’s very.. fresh.”

“Let’s go with that. Does everyone agree?” My dad looked serious. “Make a

vote.”

I smiled when I saw a majority of people raising their hands. I thanked

everyone after the meeting was adjourned. It was my first presentation and it

went really well! I was so happy with that.

“Good job, Elyse,” Ms. Garcia smiled at me.

During the weekend, I would practice my driving. Dad enrolled me in a driving

school and said that it was part of growing up. I also wanted to learn how to

drive but I was just so bad with directions. Good thing Waze was invented.

“Hindi kaya mamamatay ako rito?” Sevi was so nervous in the passenger seat.

“E’di sabay tayo,” I laughed evilly.

“Elyse, seryoso, kapag nabunggo mo ‘to, iiyak ako,” Sevi dramatically touched

the dashboard of our car.

Hindi ko siya pinansin at pinaandar na lang ang kotse. Sinisigawan niya ‘ko

kapag may natatanaw siyang kotse kahit malayo pa naman! He was so annoying!

Pati tuloy ako nagpapanic!

“Would you relax?! I enrolled in a driving school!” I glared at him and

continued driving.

“Ganitong ganito kasi palagi simula ng teleserye, babe. May car accident ‘yung

magulang tapos maiiwan ‘yung anak, tapos ‘yung nakabunggo susunugin ‘yung

kotse para itago ‘yung kasalanan niya. Tapos lumaking masayahin ‘yung bata

tapos nung nalaman niya kung paano namatay ‘yung magulang niya, maghihiganti

siya. Magpapayaman siya para-”

I stopped the car on the side of the road and glared at him.

“Is that what you do during your spare time? Kaya hindi ka na makatext sa’kin

ng goodnight?” I raised a brow at him.

“Hindi, babe. Nagtotong-its lang ako sa phone,” he gave me a peace sign.

After ML, doon naman siya naadik! Ewan ko ba! This guy and his games. Okay

lang. It was his way of relaxing kaso sumosobra talaga kapag gabi! Hindi niya

na ‘ko makausap!

“Sa 3rd anniversary natin, I want to go outside Manila,” I told him. “Kahit 3

days lang since we both have work. Is it okay with you?”

“Oh,” he gave me a nod. “Oo naman, sige. Mag.. papaalam ako.”

Kinabukasan tuloy, naging abala ako sa paghahanap ng magandang puntahan

outside Manila. I was thinking of going to an island and spending the night

there. I haven’t been to islands outside Luzon. Parang gusto kong pumunta

roon.

“Elyse!” Gulat akong napahinto sa paglalakad nang makita ko si Austin sa

lobby. “Pauwi ka na?”

He was my schoolmate in La Salle, but definitely older than me. We were

friends because his dad’s a friend of my dad. He started working here in a

high position because of his connection.

“Uh, I’ll go somewhere,” I gave him a small smile. Sevi and I will see each

other tonight.

“Saan? Baka roon din ang daan ko. Maybe I can drop you off,” he smiled at me.

“Oh, no need. I have my driver. Bye,” I said before walking away.

Sinundo ako ni Kuya Roel sa lobby at hinatid ako sa mall kung saan kami

magkikita ni Sevi. It was really a good thing that our company was near

Valeria. Madali kaming magkasundo kung saan kami pupunta. Hindi rin masyadong

hassle kapag pumili kami ng condo.

“Hi,” I sat in front of Sevi and placed my bag beside me.

He was zoning out for a moment, the reason why he reacted so late on my

presence. He smiled when he saw me and pinched my cheek. He looked tired

again. Ano bang pinaggagagawa niya sa trabaho?

“Kanina ka pa?” He asked, obviously pre-occupied by something else.

“What? Kakarating ko lang,” I glared at him. “What were you thinking about?”

“Wala, ‘yung project namin,” he massaged his forehead. “Wala. Let’s not talk

about work. How are you?”

We ordered two ramen for the both of us. We needed something hot that would

make us relax and relieve stress from work. Being an adult was so stressful. I

really really changed a lot ever since my dad took back his cards. I will

probably grow more kapag nag move out na ‘ko sa bahay dahil may bills na rin

na babayaran.

“Let’s go to Bohol,” I said after eating.

“Huh?!” Gulat niya ‘kong tinignan.

“Huh?” I mocked him and made a face.

“Bohol? Bakit Bohol?” Nagtatakang tanong niya.

“Why not? I heard maganda ang beach doon and we also have a resort there so we

could stay there na lang. Let’s book the flight now so we would get it cheap,”

I said, excited to book our first flight together.

“Sige, tingin nga ‘ko.”

The next morning, I went to work early. I stopped in front of my cubicle and

looked at the bouquet of tulips placed on my desk. My brows furrowed and

texted Sevi.

To: Sevi

Did you get me a bouquet of tulips?

Nag-reply siya kaagad.

From: Sevi

hindi. sino ‘yang gagong ‘yan

I asked the employee seated behind me to ask if she knew who put the bouquet

on my desk but she said that she didn’t see anyone. I sighed and put the

flowers aside. Wala ring note or anything. Admirer, maybe.

Sevi called me during my break time, asking about the flowers. He sounded so

cute being jealous and all.

“Don’t worry, I gave it to a random girl already,” I assured him.

[Sino ba ‘yon? Inuunahan ako ng moves!] He chuckled.

“Stop talking about it, come on. It wasn’t a big deal,” I laughed.

It did not bother me anymore. I used to receive a lot from my admirers when I

was in high school so it wasn’t really a big deal for me.

During our 3rd anniversary, like what we planned, we travelled to Bohol to

spend 3 days and 2 nights there.

“Are you nervous?” I asked Sevi while we were seated on the plane.

“Hindi ba ‘to babagsak?” He asked me back.

“Oh, you’re a nervous flyer,” I laughed and held his hand. “Don’t worry. Kapag

bumagsak ‘to, tatalon ako sa tubig kasama ka.”

“E, paano kapag hindi sa tubig ang bagsak?” His brows furrowed.

“Damn, I don’t know. That made me think,” I tilted my head a little to the

side. “Let’s just ask Hiro, I guess.”

“Sus, crush mo?” He raised a brow. “Kaya ko rin i-search ‘yon. Magtatanong ka

pa sa iba.”

“What the hell, stop being jealous,” I laughed. “He’s not even here! Chill!”

Sevi fell asleep or forced himself to sleep during the flight to ease his

nervousness. I was holding his hand the whole time. Kapag bumibitaw ako ay mas

hinihigpitan niya ang hawak niya kaya hindi ko matanggal. He was such a baby

boy.

“Babe, we’re here. Wake up,” I tried to wake him up.

Umayos siya ng upo mula sa pagkakasandal ng ulo sa balikat ko. Everyone was

already trying to get their luggages. Nakacheck-in ang sa amin at tig-isang

maliit na luggage lang kami so we just waited for it outside.

Our resort had a free shuttle service so we used that on our way to the

resort. When we arrived, people were lined up at the entrance, waiting for us.

I was so embarrased when we went out of the car and they started singing a

welcome song. It was obviously because of my family background! I didn’t ask

for this!

“Taray, parang Moana,” Sevi whispered on my ear.

“Welcome Ms. Ledezma and friend!” They greeted.

“And friend?!” Reklamo ni Sevi sa’kin.

I bit my lower lip to contain a laugh. Nag-sabit pa sila ng flower necklace sa’kin at kay Sevi bago kami dinala sa lobby. I took care of the papers while Sevi was looking around. He looked funny with his flower necklace.

“Friend, let’s go,” I called him.

“Friend, amp!” Reklamo niya bago sumunod sa’kin, pulling our luggages.

When we entered our suite, he placed our luggages in front of the cabinet. I looked outside the curtain and smiled when I saw the view of the beach. It was

so peaceful. Sevi, on the other hand, was busy looking at the PlayStation provided for us. I rolled my eyes.

“You went here to play that?” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Tinitignan ko lang, e,” he sounded defensive.

“Fix your things and then we’ll go to the beach. Dali, it’s almost sunset.”

I went inside the shower to change into my bikini. It was just a black bikini crossed around my body. I tied my hair in a bun and wore my shades before going outside. I also wore a white see-through.

“Are you done?” I asked Sevi.

He looked back at me and quickly surveyed my body. He licked his lower lip a

little and gave me a thumbs up.

“Nice. Sexy,” he chuckled. “Isang back flip nga.”

“Shut up!” Binato ko siya ng unan. “Get ready!”

“Ito na nga suot ko,” he pointed at his clothes. “Ayaw mo ba nito?”

He was wearing a white button-down polo shirt na short-sleeved at nakabukas

ang limang butones. It was partnered with a black beach shorts. Kinuha niya

ang shades niya at sinuot just to complete the look.

“Okay, that’s fine. Let’s go!”

We went out and rode a shuttle to go to the beach. Good thing we caught the

sunset. We just sat there on the sand, watching how the sky changed its color.

I placed my head on Sevi’s shoulder while holding his hand.

“I’m so proud of us,” I whispered.

“Sobra,” he chuckled.

“We will achieve more. I know that. Do you think the same?” I looked at him

with hopeful eyes.

“Oo naman,” he showed me his other hand and started enumerating. “First condo

unit together, furnitures, car.. Tapos ‘yung unit mage-evolve na. Bahay na ang

susunod nating pag-iipunan tapos saka tayo bubuo ng pamilya.”

“We will grow old together,” I nodded. “We managed to grow together as a

person. Who would have thought that we will reach 3 years, right?”

“And more,” he corrected.

I was so sure about Sevi. I was so sure that we would never separate.. That

nothing could ever make us ruin our years of relationship. Sobrang dami naming

pinagdaanan. I can’t let those go to waste.

“Let’s go,” I stood up and offered him my hand. “Let’s swim before it gets

dark.”

We fought against the waves together with him holding my hand.

Ang sweet na sana kaso bigla niya ‘kong hinampasan ng tubig, causing me to

choke on it. I glared at him and ran to catch his dumb ass. He was laughing so

hard when he reached the sand. Napaupo pa siya sa kakatawa.

“Wag! Wag kasi!” ‘Yung hampas ko sa kanya, parang kiliti. He kept on laughing.

“It hurts!” I held my nose.

“Aw, baby,” he pouted and held my face to see my condition. “I-singa mo, dali.

Sasaluhin ko.”

“You’re so disgusting!” I pushed his face away and stood up to go back to our

resort.

We rode the shuttle and just asked for room service for our dinner because

both of us were tired from swimming. Nauna siyang mag-shower kaysa sa’kin. He

knew I would spend more time in the bathroom because there was a bathtub.

I spent 30 minutes inside, washing off every sand on my body. Pagkatapos,

sinuot ko na ‘yung bathrobe ko at lumabas. Sevi was already preparing our

dinner. Dumating na pala ‘yung room service. Good thing they served it with

wine.

I sat on the floor, just in front of Sevi. My hair was still wet but I was

really starving so I couldn’t wait to eat. Sevi was looking away from me while

eating, probably bothered by the bathrobe or something. He was fully-clothed

with his grey sweatshorts and white shirt.

“Nakikita ko ‘yung boobs mo rito,” he suddenly commented.

My eyes widened and looked down on my chest. Inayos ko kaagad ang robe ko at

napainom ng wine sa sobrang hiya. Did he really have to point that out?! It

just made the atmosphere awkward. I mean, it was our first night together at

the beach.. I was expecting for.. something.

“Sevi, it’s our 3rd year na together,” I placed the wine glass on the table.

“Happy 3rd anniversary, babe,” he said, not getting the hint.

“I mean,” I fake coughed. “Isn’t it.. Uhm.. Time to.. advance..”

“Advance?” His brows furrowed, getting confused.

“Nevermind,” I rolled my eyes and poured more wine on my glass.

Natahimik siya sa sinabi ko at napainom din ng wine pagkatapos kumain. I

raised a brow when he drank it in one shot. He was staring at the floor,

thinking about something.

“Whoo, it’s getting hot,” I looked away and fixed my robe so he would see my

chest a little.

He just looked at it and shook his head like he was talking to himself. I

pouted and held on the belt of my bathrobe, looking at him.

His eyes went back to me when I pulled on the belt and it revealed my body a

little. I was just wearing my black laced panties and nothing else. Maybe he

got the hint now, huh? It was too obvious.

“Anong ginagawa mo?” He raised a brow.

“It’s hot,” pinaypayan ko ang sarili ko using my hand.

He looked away from me, his eyes getting dark. His jaw moved aggressively like

he was trying so hard to stop himself.

“Come on, please,” I begged for it.

Mariin niyang pinikit ang mga mata niya habang minamasahe ang sentido niya. I

looked up at him when he suddenly stood up, sighing heavily.

“Kama,” he said, looking serious.

I stood up and nervously sat at the side of the bed. My bathrobe was already

falling on my shoulders, revealing my chest. Sevi opened the drawer to check

something before closing it again.

“Babe,” I reached out for his hand.

“Elyse-”

I stood up and cut him off by giving him a kiss. I wrapped my arms around his

neck when he did not respond. I heard him mutter a curse between the kiss

before wrapping his hands around my waist, pulling me closer to him.

“Once,” I whispered before kissing him again. “Just once.”

He groaned when I sucked on his lower lip and pushed my tongue inside his mouth. He sucked on it and slowly pulled my bathrobe off my shoulder. When it fell to the floor, he pushed me to the bed and went on top of me, still kissing me. I reached for the remote on the side table to dim the lights.

His kisses went from my lips down to my neck. My face heated when he started kissing my chest. His hand held my mound and massaged it while sucking on the other one. He did that alternately. I had to bit my lower lip so I wouldn't moan too hard.

I pulled on the hem of his shirt so he stopped to take it off. I licked my lower lip when I saw his fine body. My breathing became heavy when his kisses went down to my tummy until it reached my panties.

He gave me a soft kiss and looked at me in the eyes like he was asking permission. I gave him a slight nod. He kissed me again before putting his hand inside my underwear, caressing my insides. I was already moaning on his mouth, feeling my wetness down there.

"Ah!" I bit my lower lip when he smoothly pushed a finger inside. It hurt a little.

“Masakit?” He asked with concern in his eyes.

I nodded. He slowly took his finger out and pushed it back again until I felt pleasure on it. His thumb was rubbing my sensitive bud while thrusting a finger inside. When I closed my eyes in pleasure, I felt two fingers inside me, stretching me.

“Sev.. Ahm..” He covered my mouth with his other hand.

“Shush,” he said while thrusting his fingers inside me while rubbing my sensitive bud, causing me too much pleasure.

I was panting heavily until I felt my release. His fingers slowed down inside me until he pulled it out and rubbed my juice on me, making me even more wet.

“Oh my god,” I held a handful of his hair when I felt his tongue on my entrance. “Sevi!”

He entered another finger inside me while thrusting his tongue. I closed my eyes again, feeling another one building up on my stomach. He knew what he was doing. I was so sure of that.

“I’m.. I’m coming,” I tried to close my legs but he was holding me in place.

I sighed heavily when he suddenly stopped and stood up to take his shorts and boxers off. My eyes widened when I saw the thickness and length of his shaft.

I had no time to process everything because he went on top of me again and reached for something on the drawer.

“W-what’s that?” I asked.

“Condom?” He showed it to me before opening the pack with his teeth.

“Oh,” I looked away. It was my first time seeing that.

I watched how he put it on so I could do it next time. I still couldn’t get over his damn length. Would that even.. fit me?! I felt scared for myself. I knew I asked for this but I really did not expect this.

He put his finger inside me again to check my wetness. I moaned and bit on my finger when he thrusted it inside me before finally pushing his shaft inside.

Pain.

It was all I felt.

It was so painful. It was so so so painful. I closed my eyes and bit a pillow so I could take out the pain on something else. Sevi looked at me with concern and gave me a kiss.

“Sigurado ka ba? Pwede namang hindi ko ituloy-”

“No, please, continue,” I put a hand on his waist to pull him closer.

He looked pained, too, when he pushed again inside me. It was like stretching

me. It stretched me so bad. I looked down and I saw half of him inside me. So

it wasn’t his best yet.

“Go all in,” I begged. He was just delaying the pain. I wanted to feel it

already.

I screamed when he pushed everything inside me. He sighed heavily on my neck.

I could feel his pulse inside me, wanting so bad to move but he couldn’t.

“I’m fine,” I wiped the tear on my eye.

He kissed my cheek and started moving slow, making me adjust to the pain. I

wanted to cry out of pain but he was whispering sweet things on me to stop the

tears.

Slowly, the pain was replaced with pleasure. I started moving my hips so he

could go faster. I think he got the hint because he started thrusting inside

me so fast and so deep I could hear the bed moving.

“Ah, fuck,” he whispered on my neck.

He kneeled in front of me and held my waist in place before pushing himself

again inside me. He looked up and closed his eyes while thrusting on me. I

moved my hips with him. I felt more pleasure on that angle.

“I think I’m..” Coming.

I moaned his name when I felt another release. His thrusts started to get sloppy until he made one deep thrust and looked up again, panting heavily. I could see the veins in his hands. His chest was heaving.

He pulled out and stood up to go to the bathroom. I was left in the bed, feeling so tired. Sevi went back, holding a box of tissue and wipes. He was now wearing his boxers. I flinched when he started wiping me with wipes.

“It hurts,” I pouted. “It’s sensitive right now.”

“Sorry,” he laughed and wiped me again with tissue.

Kinuha niya ang panty ko sa sahig at sinuot sa’kin. I turned my body sideways to get off the bed. I felt the pain down there but I still tried to walk towards the bathroom like an injured woman.

“Nakakaguilty naman,” Sevi pouted.

“I’m fine!” I assured him.

I washed myself with warm water before brushing my teeth. Sevi handed me his shirt so I wore it with my laced panty before walking towards the bed again.

Humiga ako at yumakap ng unan, pagod na pagod.

“I’m sorry,” Sevi sat beside me, still looking guilty.

“It was amazing. Stop saying sorry,” I rolled my eyes.

Humiga rin siya sa tabi ko at niyakap ako patalikod. I could feel his breath

on my neck so I pushed my body closer to him. He kissed my cheek and started

combing my hair with his hand. I closed my eyes, dozing off to sleep.

“Eli,” he called behind me. “Gising ka pa?”

“Hmm,” I hummed, half-asleep now.

“Gusto mong malaman kung gaano kita kamahal?”

I opened my eyes and turned to his side so I could see him clearly. He gave me

a small smile and held my face to give me a kiss.

“Papakasalan kita,” he whispered.

:o

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“I think okay ‘to, diba, babe?”

Nilibot ko ang paningin ko sa unit. It has a veranda and it was spacious,

maybe because it’s still empty. The owner of the building was my mom’s friend

so I managed to get a discount. Mataas din ang nakuha naming floor so kita ang

city lights sa glass wall.

“3 bedrooms. Not so bad, right?” I looked at Sevi. “It’s so hard to find a

unit here in our place.”

“Maganda,” Sevi nodded after looking at the rooms and its space. “Pwede naman

‘tong hulog-hulugan, diba?”

“Yes,” I smiled. “I’ll take care of it. I told you I know the owner. Let’s buy

this na?”

Sevi’s nod made me jump out of joy. I immediately went outside to meet the

woman offering the unit to us. I asked her to call me kapag na-process na niya

ang papers and kapag need niya ng sign ko or other documents.

It was so surreal. Us, picking a unit after going through 6 buildings! Ito na

ang pinakamatino at pinakamura naming nakuha. We were in a business city so it

was really hard to find an empty unit. Sevi wanted it empty so we could pick

the furniture ourselves and he also wanted to fix it a bit.

“Lumipat ka na pala sa Operations Management?” Austin suddenly talked to me

while I was getting coffee.

“Yes. I want to try working in every department,” I said while waiting.

“I remember the woman you were always with. What a miracle na hindi mo siya

kasama ngayon, huh?” He was asking nonsense questions. “Mag-isa ka na lang

palagi.”

“Yeah, Ida’s working in their company sa U.S.,” I got my cup of coffee and

walked away.

How chismoso! Palagi na lang niya ‘kong kinakausap kapag nakikita niya ‘ko.

Wala ba siyang friends or what?

I walked out of the building and started walking towards our nearest hotel.

Pinapapunta ako roon ng head namin so I could check some files. It was so hot

I had to bring an umbrella and wear shades. Unti-unti na ‘kong nasasanay sa

heels ko. I could walk a distance with them.

“Hello,” I greeted the receptionist and went through the desk to check the

computers. They just let me do that.

I was browsing on it when Sevi suddenly called. Sinagot ko ‘yon at inipit ang

phone between my ear and my shoulder. My hands were too busy scrolling and

typing.

“Yes, baby?” I answered.

[Lunch. Nag-lunch ka na?] He kept on reminding me that.

“No but I’m drinking coffee. I’ll eat after this,” I stopped typing to hold my phone. “How about you? Nasa unit ka na?”

[Oo, naglagay ako ng tiles at inayos ko ‘yung ceiling. Kasama ko si Luna. Nagpatulong lang ako.] He explained.

“Okay, then,” I nodded even though I felt a little bit of jealousy. “Don’t forget to eat.”

[Yes, babe. I love you.]

“I love you,” I answered back before ending the call.

I stood up and went to the restaurant to check if everything was in place. I also met the managers and checked the kitchen. I went to the gym and to the pool side before going back to the company. I had to report back.

Weeks after polishing our unit, Sevi and I went to the mall to look for pieces of furniture. I really felt like an adult. There were so many things that we had to consider like money, size, importance, hindi lang basta pipili like how I pick my bags. It was relaxing, though. Picking furniture for us was relaxing except kapag ayaw niya at nag-aaway kami.

“I want a bigger bed,” I crossed my arms over my chest.

Sevi was too busy getting the size of the white wooden bed. He really brought

his notebook, pen, and tape measure like an engineer. What a nerd. He drew the

whole unit in his notebook together with the sizes. He also sketched the

positions of the furniture we will buy para sigurado. I agreed on that one.

“Hindi mo naman kailangan ng malaking kama. Sisiksikin mo lang din naman ako,”

reklamo ni Sevi.

I was like that in Bohol. He couldn’t get over that because he fell on the bed

at midnight. I didn’t know! Nagising na lang ako sa kalampag niya sa sahig. I

really should work on my sleeping position.

“You have a point,” I nodded. Okay, then! I should consider that one. “How

about a bathtub, babe? I want a bathtub.”

“May built-in shower na roon at okay naman kaya bakit magba-bathtub pa?”

Reklamo niya nanaman.

“Bathtub na may shower,” I gave him a cute smile.

“Anong-” He stopped talking when his phone rang. Sinagot niya kaagad at

tumalikod sa’kin saglit. “Sir, opo. Napuntahan ko na kahapon.”

Work again! Day off niya ngayon pero tinatawagan pa rin siya ng head nila! So

annoying! Ang sungit pa naman noon! He would always yell at Sevi through the

phone. Sevi would always apologize. Palagi na lang! I can’t wait for that old

man to retire.

Heater na lang ang hinanap ko since ayaw niya ng bathtub. E’di huwag! I looked

for cute bathroom mirrors, too hanggang sa akbayan na ulit ako ni Sevi, tapos

nang makipag-usap sa boss nila.

Since may tatlong bedrooms at isa lang naman ang kailangan namin, I convinced

him to make one room as our closet since marami akong gamit and ‘yung other

room naman ay office, where we could work.

After buying our furniture, we went to our unit again so he could fix the

lights. Tinulungan ko siya sa mga box kahit mabigat. I was struggling with

them! I told him to just hire men and pay them but he wanted to save money.

Besides, sabi niya kaya naman daw niyang gawin.

“I’m going to die from this,” I placed the box on the floor and wiped my

sweat.

Sevi was standing on that ladder, fixing the lights. I sat on the floor while

waiting for him to finish. Wala pa kaming couch so sa sahig muna ako nakaupo.

Next week, dadating na ‘yung furniture namin. Last month naghanap na rin kami

online at padating na rin ‘yon.

“Babe,” I called.

“Hmm?” He went down the ladder and moved it towards the kitchen.

“Wala na ‘kong pera,” I laughed.

“Ako rin,” he laughed too.

It was fine. I’ll get my salary na for this month so babalik din ‘yon. Hindi

rin naman nakakapanghinayang since we used our money for important things like

this unit. At least kami rin ang makikinabang.

I had to sell my old bags for money. Hindi ko naman na masyadong ginagamit

kaya pwede na. Besides, mas importante pang gumastos ng pera para sa comfort

namin ni Sevi kaysa sa bags na ‘yon.

“How are things working around, Elyse?” My dad asked while we were eating

dinner.

“We’re fixing our unit na, Dad,” I answered. “I might move out next month.”

“Oh, baby,” my mom made a sad face. “I heard you sold some of your bags. If

you need financial help, just don’t hesitate to-”

“It’s fine, Mommy,” I assured her. “I need to sacrifice for greater things.

Sevi and I will work on it together.”

“You’re growing already,” my dad nodded.

“He makes me grow, Dad,” I gave him a sincere smile.

“You’ll get promoted as the Operations head tomorrow. You need to start

managing our hotels and resort and go hands-on,” my dad told me.

“Okay, Dad. Thank you,” I nodded.

Higher salary! Hindi ko alam kung ginawa niya ‘yon dahil alam niyang kaya ko

or dahil gusto niyang makatulong financially but he wanted to be lowkey about

it. Whatever it was, I was still glad to climb my way to the top.

Sunday was our time to fix the unit. This time, Sevi really hired men to help

us with the furniture. I mean, hindi naman namin kayang buhatin lahat ‘yon! I

was wearing a pair of sweatpants and a white racerback. I knew I would sweat

today.

“Hindi, usog niyo pa,” Sevi pointed at the bed. “May marka na dyan. I-sagad

niyo roon.” He was so precise with it.

After placing the furniture, I started sweeping on the floor. I even used a

vacuum so it would be cleaner. Sevi took his shirt off to move some pieces of

furniture again, not satisfied with the position. After that, he helped me mop

the floor.

“Basa na nga ‘yung sahig, binabasa mo pa lalo,” Sevi chuckled. “Taas ng floor

natin pero binabaha pa rin tayo? Amp!”

“Okay, smarty pants! Teach me how!” I rolled my eyes and made him hold the

mop.

“Oh, eto sa’yo. Magpunas ka ng alikabok sa shelves,” he gave me a wet cloth.

I bent down to wipe the table. “Ah! What the fuck, Sevi!”

I yelled and hit him in his harm when he smacked my ass with his hand. Binato

ko sa kanya ang basahan at sinamaan siya ng tingin. Tumatawa lang siya habang

nagmo-mop.

The next week, I started packing my things. It was on Saturday night. My mom

was helping me pack which made me emotional, especially when she started

tearing up. I bit my lower lip and looked at her, not knowing what to do.

“For so many years, you were beside me,” she wiped the tears in her eyes.

“Mom, I’m just leaving the house. I’m not going to marry yet,” I sighed and

held her hand. “If you’re worry about your health, don’t worry, nandyan ‘yung

personal nurse mo. You can also call me if anything happens.”

“No, I’m just.. I’m happy for you, Eli,” she gave me a smile. “I could tell

how much you love him.”

“I love you more, Mom. I will always love you more,” I assured her.

“Eat well, okay?” Hinaplos niya ang buhok ko at ngumiti sa’kin. “Learn how to

cook and clean the house. Learn how to buy groceries. Learn how to save money.

You still have a long way to go but I want to tell you how proud I am because

you’re starting to be independent.”

“Mommy,” I bit my lower lip when my tears started to fall.

“I’m not going to live forever, love,” she hugged me.

“Mom, stop saying that,” I started crying on her chest.

“But I will always be here,” she whispered. “Because I’m a mother.”

“Thank you, Mommy,” I sobbed. “For.. everything.”

She hugged me tighter. I could feel her trying to stifle her sobs so I

wouldn’t hear them. Maybe it was not because of me leaving.. Maybe because it

was about.. her.

“I want you to stay healthy, anak,” she kept on reminding me. “Work hard but

don’t forget to eat well. Do it for your mommy.”

I nodded. She gave my forehead a soft kiss and whispered how much she loved me

before letting me go. Pinunasan ko ang luha ko at sinara ang maleta ko, handa

nang umalis. I gave her a hug again before leaving.

Kuya Roel helped me with my luggages. Tahimik lang ako habang nasa byahe. Sevi

texted na naroon na siya and he already cleaned the unit. When the car stopped

in front of the lobby, I went out of the car and got my luggages out.

“Thank you, Kuya Roel,” I gave him a smile.

“Ingat po kayo palagi, Ma’am,” he bowed.

Tumalikod na ‘ko at hinatak ang maleta ko papasok ng lobby. When I reached the

unit, Sevi opened the door and helped me with my bags. Medyo magulo pa dahil

nag-aayos pa siya ng gamit niya.

“Ito, side ko ‘to,” he pointed at one shelf sa loob ng walk-in closet namin.

“Tapos.. Sa’yo na ‘yan lahat.”

“Hey, kaunti lang kaya ‘yung akin!” I defended myself.

“O sige nga! Ilagay mo muna mga damit mo para magkaalaman tayo rito!”

“Whatever! Pangit mo!” I made a face.

“Talaga? Pangit ako?” He raised a brow.

“Yes!” Of course not!

“Bakit nakikipagsex ka sa pangit?” He asked and smirked.

Kinuha ko ang bag ko at hinampas sa kanya. He just laughed while I was glaring

at him. Nawala rin ang sama ng tingin ko nang hawakan niya ang mukha ko para

halikan. I leaned on the wall while he was kissing me deeper. My brows

furrowed when he suddenly stopped.

“Mag-ayos ka na ng gamit mo, oy,” he chuckled. “Puro harot.”

I rolled my eyes and opened my luggages to transfer my clothes to the shelves.

Pati hangers galing sa cabinet ko, dinala ko na. Kung marami akong damit, si

Sevi naman maraming sapatos! He was taking care of them like his own child.

Todo punas pa siya kapag may kaunting dumi.

“Babe, magkasundo tayo,” he held my arm.

I raised a brow and looked at him. I wasn’t done placing my bags yet.

“Kapag nag-away tayo, walang gagalaw ng sapatos, ah,” he made that clear.

“Ibato mo na ‘yung cellphone ko, huwag lang ‘yung sapatos ko.”

“Okay, then. Don’t you ever touch my bags or my makeup,” I glared at him. “Or

else you will sleep outside.”

“Paano pag gusto kita i-prank? Pwede ba ‘yon?” He gave me an evil smile.

“Prank?” I gave him a sweet smile before pushing him lightly. “Prank mo mukha

mo! Puro ka kalokohan!”

“Hala, nagiging katunog mo na si Mama,” he scratched his head a little. “Tsk.

Ano ba ‘yan! Lumipat nga ‘ko rito para hindi ako masermunan, e.”

“Then go back to your place!”

“Eto naman, hindi mabiro.”

Umirap lang ako at bumalik na sa ginagawa. After placing my things on the

shelves, I realized that he was right. Marami nga akong gamit. Kasya naman

‘yung sa kanya sa space niya so hindi na siya nag-reklamo.

I went out of the room and visited the bathroom to place my essentials. I

laughed when I realized how many it was compared to Sevi’s.

“Bebe, magluluto ba ‘ko o oorder muna tayo?” Sumilip siya sa bathroom, holding

his phone.

“Are you stupid? Wala pa tayong groceries,” I laughed.

“Luh, oo nga ‘no,” he chuckled.

I went to the bedroom to place some of my small pillows while he was busy

ordering Chinese food. Our bedroom was in the color brown, white, and black. I

sat on the bed and placed a two picture frames on the side table. It was a

picture of us during his graduation, and during mine.

“Bebe, nakapag-order na ‘ko,” Sevi entered the room.

“We should add a painting there,” I pointed at the empty wall.

Sevi sat beside me and held my hand. He looked at the wall and nodded,

realizing that it really looked empty. I placed my head on his shoulder and

let out a heavy sigh.

“Bakit?” He asked. “May problema ba?”

“No, everything feels so surreal,” I smiled at myself. “I just can’t believe

that.. starting today, I’ll be living with the man I love.”

“Ito na ang tunay na laban,” he chuckled. “Basta, kapag may problema tayo,

sabihin mo kaagad para maayos natin, ah. Walang matutulog nang magkaaway.”

“Okay, then. Toilet seat down,” I looked at him and smirked. “Don’t leave it up.”

“Kapag ako nagluto, ikaw maghuhugas,” he negotiated too.

“Okay. Let’s pay for the bills half-half, or if you want, one of us will pay per month,” I raised a brow.

“Sige, half-half tayo sa groceries. Sa bill, ako muna ngayong buwan tapos ikaw sa next. Salitan para hindi magulo.”

“Okay, deal,” I nodded.

“Dahil dyan, walang mag-aaircon ngayong buwan!”

“Hey!” Reklamo ko at hinampas siya.

He laughed and held my hand to pull me closer to him. He held my face and gave me a kiss. I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him back. I giggled when he pushed me down the bed and started kissing my neck.

We made love for the first time in this bed. I hugged Sevi and cuddled with him while panting. We were both naked so when we heard the doorbell, we looked at each other to see who will get up to get the food.

“You,” I pointed at his face. “Get the food. You ordered it.”

“Ako na nga nag-order. Ikaw na kumuha. Pagod na ‘ko. Mamamatay na ata ako,” he

exaggerated.

“Okay, then. I’ll go there naked,” bumaba ako sa kama, dala-dala ang kumot.

“Ako na! Ako na!” Sevi sighed and stood up.

Nagbihis siya ng boxers at shirt bago lumabas para kuhanin ang takeout. I put

my panties on and wore my shirt again before going out of the bedroom. Sevi

was already fixing the food on the table.

“Libre ko na ‘to. Kawawa ka naman at wala ka atang pera,” pagyayabang ni Sevi

sa’kin.

“Excuse me! I got promoted! Yayaman din ako!” I rolled my eyes and sat in

front of him.

“Sana all,” he chuckled.

The next day, both of us had to go to work. Nagising ako sa alarm niya around

4 AM. Hinampas ko tuloy siya ng unan. It was too early! Ang lapit lang ng

company! Pwedeng lakarin! We don’t need to wake up that early.

“Too early, babe,” reklamo ko. “You made me sleep late last night and then

maga-alarm ka ng 4 AM!”

“Mag-gygym kasi ako,” he explained. “Sumama ka para naman maunat buto mo

dyan.”

I rolled my eyes and changed my clothes. I wore a pair of leggings and a black

sports bra. I tied my hair in a ponytail before leaving the unit with him. He

was wearing a black sleeveless shirt and black athletic shorts. We were

matchy.

I was forced to work out because of him. It was a good thing, actually. We

adapt to each other’s lifestyle. Also, it was fun because I could watch him

working out. He was hot.

We went back to our unit around 6 AM and took a shower. Good thing our unit

had two bathrooms so we wouldn’t be late waiting for each other to finish.

Around 6:30 AM, we were both picking out clothes to wear. I just wore a simple

pencil skirt and cream blouse. Siya naman navy blue polo shirt and pants.

I heated our leftover last night so we could eat something for breakfast.

“Slow down. Why are you eating so fast? 8 pa ang pasok,” I looked at my watch.

“Breakfast nga, e. Kailangan mabilis,” he laughed.

“Oh god,” I massaged my head. “How am I going to live with these tito jokes?”

“Hindi ‘yon tito joke, ah! Pinag-isipan ko ‘yon!”

“Yeah, whatever,” I rolled my eyes.

Sabay na kaming bumaba ni Sevi around 7:25 AM. Magkaiba ‘yung way namin so he

kissed me on my cheek before walking away. I arrived at work around 7:50 AM. I

had my own office now since I got promoted.

“Elyse,” Austin went inside my office.

“Yes?” I raised a brow while typing on my laptop.

“Do you have a plan tonight?” He looked hopeful.

“What plan?” My brows furrowed. “Yes, I’m going to buy groceries.”

“Really? Can I come? I can help-”

“With my boyfriend,” I cut him off.

“Oh,” he slowly nodded. He looked disappointed. “I.. heard you moved out of

your house? Saan ka na ngayon? Baka pareho tayo ng condo.”

“Yeah, I’m now living with my boyfriend,” I made that clear.

“Oh, wow,” he nodded again. “Okay. See you around.”

Like what I said, after work, Sevi and I decided to go grocery shopping. It

was our first grocery shopping together so it was important to me. He was a

little late because he had a problem sa site nila but it was fixed na raw by

Bianca.

“Baby, we don’t need that,” nagpahalumbaba ako nang makitang kumukuha siya ng

beer.

“Kaunti lang, e,” he pouted and placed 4 cans sa cart.

“Your tummy will get big kapag nag-beer ka nang nag-beer,” I reminded him.

“Hoy, grabe, huwag kang mag-alala, hindi mawawala abs ko,” he smirked.

“Kunwari ka pa. ‘Yun lang pinoproblema mo kasi wala ka nang mahahawakan.”

“Ew,” I rolled my eyes.

He had more knowledge about meat and vegetables so I let him choose. Tinuruan

niya rin ako kung paano pumili para magawa ko mag-isa sa susunod. We paid for

the groceries half-half. Medyo mahal nga lang dahil kakalipat lang kaya marami

pa kaming kailangan. My mom gave us boxes of kitchen essentials so bawas na sa

gastos.

Sevi and I carried our groceries to our unit. Napahinto kami nang makita si

Daddy na nakatayo roon sa tapat ng pintuan namin, kumakatok. His bodyguard was

holding a box, nakabalot pa at may ribbon.

“Dad!” Gulat na sabi ko.

“Oh, Elyse. I was wondering why no one was answering,” he chuckled.

“Good evening, Sir,” Sevi greeted while holding our groceries.

“Good evening, Engineer Camero. I was around the corner so I wanted to see

your place. Is that okay?” My dad gave us a smile. “I also bought a gift.”

“Come in, Dad,” I opened the door and placed our groceries on the countertop.

“I’m sorry. We were kind of rushing earlier this morning. It’s a little

messy.”

“It’s okay. I just wanted to see if you’re doing okay,” my dad looked around

the living room.

His bodyguard gave me the box so I placed it on the table and opened it. My

eyes widened when I saw a brand new iMac. I jumped out of joy and gave my dad

a hug. I blinked twice when I realized that his smell was different. I set

that aside and just focused on the gift. Finally! May computer na kami!

“Thank you, Dad!” I let him go and gave him a smile.

“Anyway, it seems like Engineer Camero is taking good care of you. I’ll head

out now,” my dad offered his hand to Sevi.

Nakipag-shake hands naman si Sevi at yumuko nang kaunti to pay respect to my

dad. I waved at him before closing the door again.

“Shet, may computer na tayo!” Tuwang tuwang sabi ni Sevi at nauna pang buksan

ang box.

Sevi and I were still busy with work but at least at the end of the day, we

would sleep next to each other. I was just a little sad because a day before

our 4th anniversary, I had to go to Boracay to check our hotel. Kinabukasan,

gabi na ‘ko makakauwi.

“Nagmamadali ka atang bumalik?” Austin asked while we were waiting for our

flight back to Manila. He had to come with me for some reason.

“Yes,” maikling sagot ko.

“May susundo ba sa’yo sa airport? I can drop you off,” he insisted.

“No, thanks. I asked my dad’s driver to pick me up,” I said while texting on

my phone.

“Are you texting your boyfriend?” He was so nosy.

“Yes, I’m just asking him something about work.”

“What’s his job?” He raised a brow.

“He’s an engineer,” I said proudly.

“Oh,” he nodded. “Did you know? We were supposed to be married but your dad

declined my dad’s offer.”

“Uhm, so?” My brows furrowed.

“Just saying,” he shrugged. “The thing about romantic relationships is that..

they are so unpredictable, you know? One day, you’re inlove with him and then

the next day, you will feel empty.”

“Why the hell are you being so weird, dude? What the fuck,” I rolled my eyes

and stood up.

“Just saying.”

Nauna na ‘kong sumakay sa eroplano. Gosh, he was so annoying. Mabuti na lang

at hindi kami tabi sa airplane. I didn’t want to hear his voice anymore. He

sounded like a spoiled son!

How ironic. I was once like him. Did I sound that annoying?

10 PM na nang makarating kami sa Manila. Kuya Roel picked me up and dropped me

off in front of the lobby around 11 PM. I still had an hour before the end of

our anniversary. Dali-dali akong sumakay ng elevator at umakyat sa condo.

When I opened the door, the lights were out. I placed my bag on the table. I

was about to switch the lights on when Sevi suddenly came out of the room, holding a damn cake with candles on!

“What the hell, you scared me!” I held on my chest.

He laughed and placed the cake on the table before giving me a hug from behind. He kissed my cheek and looked at the candles.

“Wish tayo bago natin hipan,” pumunta siya sa kabilang side ng table.

I closed my eyes and whispered a wish. Sabay naming hinipan ang kandila. He opened the lights and gave me a soft kiss.

“Happy 4th anniversary,” he whispered. “Umabot ka pa, ah.”

“You waited for me, huh?” I raised a brow. “Kahit sabi ko bukas pa ‘ko makakauwi?”

“Kilala na kitang scammer ka,” he smirked. “Akala mo maiisahan mo pa ‘ko, ah. Advance ako mag-isip.”

We also spent our Christmas together. Nakakatuwa palang mamili ng decorations para sa condo. We had a hard time picking out a Christmas tree. Ang dami niyang arte! I wanted it white but he preferred the traditional green.

“Wala naman tayo sa ibang bansa. Walang White Christmas,” he reasoned out.

“Okay, then! E’di green na!”

After that, we bought gifts for our families. He also bought a gift for Avi.

Matagal ko nang hindi nakikita ‘yung batang ‘yon. She would be turning four

years old a month from now. Madalas pa rin silang nagkikita ni Sevi, though.

Sometimes, Yanna would bring the kid to Valeria Group. I haven’t seen them in

ages. Pare-pareho na kaming busy.

My mom got hospitalized for two weeks when she fainted due to a minor heart

attack. Good thing she was doing better now.

“Pumayag si Luna na ipagamit sa’kin ‘yung luma niyang BMW,” Sevi said while we

were eating our dinner.

I tried cooking sweet and sour pork. Sevi taught me how to cook, pero hindi pa

‘ko magaling. Tinitiis niya naman, though. Kahit hindi masarap, kinakain niya

pa rin.

“Really? You should pay her,” my brows furrowed.

“Huwag na raw,” he shrugged.

“What? Does she like you?” I raised a brow.

“Hala siya,” Sevi laughed. “Hindi, ah. May bago kasing sasakyan ‘yon. Hindi

naman daw niya kailangan ng dalawa. Hangga’t hindi pa raw ako nakakabili ng

sariling sasakyan, pwede ko raw gamitin.”

“Hmm, okay, then,” I shrugged.

He was looking for a car pala. He should have told me. May kotse rin naman

kami, ah! Papayag pa si Daddy ibigay ‘yon, hindi hiram.. but whatever. It was

his choice.

“May major project ka ba ngayon?” I asked him.

“Wala pa. Hindi pa ‘ko professional, diba? Malapit na, huwag kang mag-alala,”

he chuckled.

“Hmm, kapag naging CEO na ‘ko, I’ll hire your company to build one of our

hotels or resorts,” I shrugged. “Tapos ikaw ang head engineer. Major project,

right?!”

“Favoritism ka naman non,” he shook his head.

“I’m just excited. I really want us to work together on a project or

something.”

“Hintay ka nang ilang years. Hindi pa ‘ko magaling,” he laughed.

“Hintay ka rin. Hindi pa ‘ko pwede mag-CEO,” I smirked.

It was New Year’s Eve. We were drinking wine at the balcony, watching the

fireworks from different directions. The city was so alive. He was hugging me

from behind and I was leaning on his chest, holding my wine glass. I was only

wearing my silk bathrobe. We just finished making love.

“So beautiful,” I pointed at the city lights. “And this life.. with you. It’s

beautiful.”

Humigpit ang yakap niya sa’kin kaya napatingin ako sa kanya. Kinuha niya ang

isang kamay ko at hinawakan ‘yon. I looked back at him and gave him a kiss on

the chin.

“May ibibigay ako,” he whispered.

I placed the wine glass on the table and turned around to look at him. My eyes

widened when he showed me a knot ring.

“What..” I whispered.

“Hindi pa kita pwedeng alukin ng kasal ngayon,” he gave me a small smile.

“Kaya pangako lang muna ang kaya kong ibigay sa’yo.”

A tear fell from my eye when he slipped the promise ring on my finger. He

stared at it and touched it lovingly.

“I love you,” he gave me a hug. “I’ll become more successful.. and then I’ll marry you.”

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:)

21

“It’s Sunday, where are you going?”

I pouted and tried to reach for Sevi with my arms. I was preparing coffee in

the morning and then I saw him fully-dressed, ready to leave the unit. He went

to my side to use the toaster.

“May emergency meeting lang,” he kissed my forehead.

“It’s supposed to be babe day,” I glared at him. Sunday na nga lang kami

magkakasama buong araw tapos aalis pa siya.

He was about to talk but his phone suddenly rang. Sinagot niya ‘yon kasabay ng

pagkuha niya sa bread. Nilapag niya ‘yon sa plato at tumalikod sa’kin.

“Bianca,” he greeted. “Oo, papunta na ‘ko. Eto na, nagmamadali na.”

He took a bite on his bread and went to me to give me a soft kiss before

leaving the unit. I pouted when the door closed. Naiwan nanaman ako mag-isa

rito! Mas nagiging busy lang siya bawat araw, but I understood that.

He was always with that woman. I sighed heavily, trying to stop my jealousy.

It was pointless. I shouldn’t feel jealous. He was already living with me for

heaven’s sake. What could even go wrong?

Naghanap na lang ako ng kakaabalahan after eating breakfast. I started

cleaning the whole unit and organizing all our stuff. After that, I went to

the gym and went back up again. After taking a shower, I took a nap. I was so

tired.

“Baby,” I heard Sevi’s voice.

I opened my eyes and looked at him before looking at the time. It was already

dinner time and I failed to cook something for us! Oh my gosh, I also forgot

to eat lunch. Umupo ako sa kama at inayos ang mukha at buhok ko.

“Kumain ka ba?” He asked. He was still wearing his work outfit.

“No, I forgot,” I sighed.

“You forgot?” His brows furrowed. “Paano mo nakakalimutan ‘yung pag-kain?

Pwede ba ‘yon? Kailangan mo ‘yun, ah.”

“I fell asleep,” I rolled my eyes and went off the bed. “I’ll cook dinner.”

“Huwag na. Mukhang pagod ka. Ako na magluluto,” he kissed my cheek and went

out of the room, taking his shirt off.

The next day, hindi ako nagising sa 4 AM niyang alarm kaya pagkagising ko ay

wala na siya. He went to work early. Napailing ako at nag-ayos na ng sarili

dahil baka ma-late pa, though didiretso ako sa hotel ngayon at hindi sa office

dahil may kailangan akong i-check.

I wore a simple pair of white slacks and brown blouse partnered with heels. I

tied my long black hair in a ponytail and put a little amount of makeup on. I

also wore my shades and brought my umbrella because I had to walk to the

hotel. Sobrang init! Ang kaunti na ng puno rito. Puro building na ang

tinatayo.

“Good morning, Elyse,” I was surprised to see Austin at the lobby. He was also

checking some files.

“What are you doing here?” I stopped walking for a moment.

“May padating na V.I.P guest. I was sent here to welcome him,” he smiled. “I

guess you’re on your way to the V.I.P room? Doon din ang punta ko.”

“Well, yeah,” I rolled my eyes and continued walking.

Sinundan niya ‘ko hanggang sa elevator. Pagkarating namin sa floor, the hotel

staff was already preparing the room. I went inside to check everything. I

didn’t know why Austin was following me around. So annoying.

“Kayo pa rin ng boyfriend mo?” He suddenly asked.

“We’re at work. I will only answer work-related questions,” I said without looking at him.

“Come on, Miss Ledezma. It’s not even a hard question,” pagpupumilit niya.

When I still refused to answer him, he suddenly held my wrist and pulled me closer to him. My eyes widened and immediately pushed him to keep distance between us.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” My brows furrowed.

“I think I like you,” he smiled.

“I did not ask,” binawi ko ang palapulsuhan ko at dali-daling lumabas ng hotel room na ‘yon.

Hinabol niya ‘ko hanggang sa elevator. I stepped sideways so I wouldn’t be standing so close to him. Good thing he did not go near me again or else I would have punched him in the face.

“Ilang years na kayo ulit?” He asked again.

“Going five,” I answered, still looking in front.

“You’re stable and he has a job. Why isn’t he marrying you yet?”

“We’re still adjusting,” I pursed my lips.

“Yeah, men’s excuses,” he chuckled.

“What?” My brows furrowed when I looked at him.

“I just find it weird. Maybe he doesn’t see you as a lifetime partner. That’s all. I mean, if he’s already sure with you then why won’t he propose?” He raised a brow.

I was about to say something but the elevator opened so I just stepped out and walked away. I wouldn’t want to waste my energy arguing with that man.

Naglakad na lang ako paalis at pumunta sa restaurant. After checking everything, I went back to the company and settled in my office.

After the lunch break, I went to the board room for a meeting. I was too early so I had the time to text Sevi.

To: Sevi

Lunch? Did you eat na?

He replied in an instant.

From: Sevi

yup bb. ikaw ba? huwag mong sabihing nakalimutan mo nanaman. grr

To: Sevi

I did na hahaha

From: Sevi

i miss you

Hindi na ‘ko nakapag-reply dahil dumating na sila Daddy. Everyone in the room

stood up to welcome his presence. I looked at Sevi’s mom in a worry when I

noticed that she looked pale. She looked like she cried earlier. She still

gave me a small smile when she saw me staring.

The meeting went fast because they already asked for updates. After that, I

went back to my office and worked on another report. Around 6 PM, umuwi na ‘ko

sa unit. I showered and then cooked something for dinner.

Nakatapos na ‘ko ng isang movie sa Netflix, wala pa rin si Sevi.

To: Sevi

Hey are you coming home late? I cooked dinner

But he did not reply. I sighed heavily and clicked another movie. Hindi muna

ako kakain para may kasabay siya mamaya.

I turned the television off when I heard the sound of the key outside the

door. I shifted on my seat when I saw Sevi looking extra tired and serious. He

was talking to someone on the phone so I refused to talk or even make a sound.

He looked mad.

“Ma naman, hindi naman kakasya ‘yung sweldo ko kung ganito,” Sevi massaged his

head.

I bit my lower lip and looked away, still listening to their conversation.

Umusog ako nang umupo si Sevi sa tabi ko, problemado pa rin. Pinatong niya ang

dalawang siko sa magkabilang binti habang ang isang kamay nakasapo sa noo.

“Ano bang ginawa mo? Bakit ka nasisante?” Sevi was trying to calm himself.

What? She was fired? Kaya ba siya umiyak kanina?

“Ma,” Sevi sighed heavily. “Humanap ka na kaagad ng trabaho. Hindi talaga kaya

ng sweldo ko kung ako pa magbabayad ng tuition ni Steven, pati ‘yung mga

bayarin dyan sa bahay. Marami rin akong binabayaran dito, oh. Pinapag-aral ko

pa si Sofia. Baka naman pwedeng humanap ka muna ng pagkakakitaan mo. Medyo

tagilid pa kikitain namin sa project. Alam mo namang hindi pa ‘ko

professional.”

Tumayo na ‘ko at naglakad papuntang kusina para maghanda ng pagkain. I didn’t

want to eavesdrop anymore. Their conversation sounded painful. I just wanted

Sevi to feel okay. Pagod na nga siya, mas mapapagod pa siya ngayon.

I heated the food and placed it on the table. I pursed my lips and watched how

stressed Sevi was. He wanted so bad to throw the phone or mutter a curse but

he couldn’t. When Sevi ended the call, he leaned on the couch and covered his

face with his hands, panting.

“Babe,” I said in a small voice. “Let’s.. eat first.”

He looked at me and nodded without saying anything. Umupo siya sa tapat ko,

nakatulala pa rin kaya ako na naglagay ng pagkain sa plato niya. He gave me a

small smile and I gave it back. Tahimik lang kaming dalawa habang kumakain. He

couldn’t talk, too. He was too occupied with something else.

Pagkatapos kumain, tumayo na ‘ko at ako na ang naghugas. He went to the shower

and stayed there for 30 minutes. I sat on the bed, waiting for him to finish.

“Hey,” I greeted when he entered the room wearing his sweatshorts and white

shirt. “Come here.”

He sat beside me and sighed heavily. “I’m sorry, Eli. Ang dami ko lang

iniisip.”

“I know,” I held his hand and squeezed it a little. “I can.. cover the bills this month, don’t worry. If you need financial help, I can also find a way to earn more money-”

“Eli, huwag na,” he shook his head. “Problema ko ‘to.”

“Your problem is also my problem, okay?” I assured him.

“Maga-apply na lang din ako sa construction firm ng Valeria Group para mas maraming project. Mas malaki kita,” he massaged the bridge of his nose in frustration.

I nodded. He became more busy after that. Sunday na lang ang pahinga niya pero minsan umaalis pa rin siya. I stopped waiting for him anymore because he would go home so late, usually tuwing tulog na ‘ko, and then the next morning he would go early. Halos hindi na kami magkita during weekdays.

Like what I said, ako na ang nagbayad ng bills for this month, and for the next month, and the next month again. Ako na rin ang nagbayad ng groceries. He didn’t have time for it anymore. He was barely living.

I had to stay up for work tonight so naabutan ko ang pag-uwi niya. I stood up and went out of the study room to see him. I scrunched my nose when I smelled

the alcohol on him.

“Did you drink?” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Shit, sorry,” he almost fell.

“It’s your birthday today,” I reminded him.

“Yeah,” he chuckled and sat on the couch. “Ang ganda ng regalo sa’kin ng nanay

ko. Putangina,” he laughed again.

“What?” My brows furrowed. I leaned on the wall, far away from him. I didn’t

want the smell of alcohol.

“Bata,” he shook his head, laughing.

“What?!” My eyes widened.

“Bata,” he repeated. “Putangina talaga!”

“Hey, calm down,” I tried to process the situation.

“Putangina, paano?” He looked at me, tears started to form at the corner of

his eyes. “Paano? Paano?! Pagod na pagod na ‘ko, putangina!”

I bit my lower lip and looked away. I didn’t know what to say. It was so

painful for me to see him like this. Sobrang stressed at pagod na niya. I

understood that.

“Hiyang hiya na ‘ko, Eli,” he covered his face in frustration. “Hiyang hiya na

‘ko sa’yo. I’m sorry.”

“Hey, you shouldn’t feel ashamed,” I tried to comfort him. “Okay lang sa’kin-”

“Unti-unti nang nauubos ‘yung.. bag mo.. ‘yung mga damit mo.. ‘yung mga gamit

mo. Akala mo ba hindi ko napapansin ‘yon?” His tears started to fall.

Natahimik ako. I was paying for everything, including the unit. Hindi pa buo

ang bayad namin dito kaya hinuhulog-hulugan ko, and then may bills pa,

maintenance fee monthly, and then groceries. My salary wasn’t enough so I had

to sell some of my stuff. I didn’t want to ask my parents for help. Problema

namin ‘to, e.

“There are more important things than my stuff,” I swallowed hard. “And it’s

this relationship. Us. I can’t let you deal with your problems alone. I wanted

to help-”

“Hindi ko gusto ng tulong kung ganyan lang din ang mangyayari sa’yo!”

“Then what the fuck do you want me to do?!” I yelled. “Watch you destroy

yourself slowly?! Can you pay for the bills?! Kaya mo bang isama sa listahan

ng babayaran mo ‘yung unit na ‘to, ha?! Kaya mo?!”

“Oo na, tangina, wala na ‘kong pera. Okay na?” He shot back.

“That was not what I meant!” I defended.

“Pero totoo naman, diba?!” He stood up and got his bag. “Tapos may nabuntis

pa! Hindi siya pwedeng magtrabaho kaya ako na lang inaasahan ng lahat!

Tangina!”

Tears started falling down my cheeks when his knees became weak and just let

himself fall on the floor, crying.

“Napapagod din naman ako..” He covered his face.

“I know,” I nodded and went to him to give him a hug. “I know.”

“Napaka selfish,” he cried on my neck.

It was so painful for me. He said that he didn’t want help but I really didn’t

want to see him kill himself slowly, so I worked harder to earn more money.

Nago-overtime na ‘ko para sa kanya kaya halos sabay na kaming umuuwi sa unit.

I answered my phone when I saw my brother calling. Hindi naman siya madalas

tumatawag. He became busy din, e.

“Yes, Kuya?” Bungad ko.

[Are you at work?]

“Yes, but I can leave now. May pinophotocopy lang ako,” I leaned on the

machine. “Why?”

[We’re going somewhere. I’ll be there in 15 minutes.]

“What?! O-okay!”

Minadali ko na tuloy ‘yung pagpapaphotocopy ko at bumaba na. My brother was

driving Neil’s van again. Alam ko na kung saan kami pupunta! They always do

this!

“We’re going to pick up Ate Helen and Ate Ericka?” I concluded.

“Secret,” Kuya Neil laughed.

I rolled my eyes and just looked outside the window. I was right! Huminto kami

sa tapat ng Arrivals area at bumaba kaagad sila Kuya. Bumaba rin ako at

lumingon sa paligid para hanapin sila.

“Ate Helen!” I waved when I saw them.

The excitement on my face was replaced with shock when I saw another friend. I

smiled wider and gave Hiro a hug.

“What the heck, you’re back!” I hit him on his arm.

“For good,” he chuckled.

I had dinner with them and we talked a lot about work. I forgot to bring up

that I was already living with my boyfriend. I really didn’t have to. They

didn’t ask about it. Ang sabi ko lang, kailangan ko nang umuwi dahil may

naghihintay na sa’kin.

“Sus, may boyfriend na!” Pang-aasar ni Ate Ericka. “Pakilala mo sa’min ‘yan,

ah!”

“Of course. He’s too busy lang but I’ll ask him!” I chuckled before leaving.

And I was back to my usual routine. It continued after weeks, and weeks and

weeks. I celebrated my birthday with Sevi. Good thing he went home early that

night or else it would result to a really big fight.

My body got used to hard work na, but I would still feel so tired at night.

Saturday, maaga akong umalis para bisitahin si Sevi sa site nila. I even

prepared food for him. Halos hindi na siya kumakain, e.

“Hi, si Engineer Camero?” I asked a construction worker.

“Naroon po,” he pointed at the left side.

I stopped walking when I saw him with the other engineer, ‘yung kasama niya

mag-lunch. Bianca, if I remember it correctly. They were talking about

something while eating. Kumakain na pala siya, nagdala pa ‘ko ng food.

“Uy,” Sevi smiled when he saw me.

Tinago ko sa likod ko ang dala kong food at ngumiti sa kanya bago naglakad

palapit. Bianca gave me a smile. Hindi ko alam kung ako lang ‘yon pero parang

nang-aasar ang ngiti niya. I got annoyed real quick.

“Hindi mo sinabing pupunta ka,” Sevi put his hand on my waist and kissed my

forehead.

“Yeah, I was planning to surprise you. Uhm, kumakain ka na pala. I thought

hindi pa,” I gave him a small smile.

“Yes, dinalhan ko siya ng extra food. Hindi siya masyadong kumakain, e. I got

worried,” Bianca said, smiling.

I bit my lower lip and nodded. I commuted all the way here. Sayang ang effort

ko, but it was fine.

“Oh, pagkain ba ‘yan?” Sevi pointed at the paper bag I was holding.

“Oh, yeah. Lunch ko kanina. Ubos na ‘yan, though. Tupperware na lang natira,”

I lied. “Anyway, I’ll go na. Matagal pa ata kayo.”

Sevi shook his head. “Hindi naman-”

“Magagalit si Sir kapag umalis kami rito kaagad. Mukhang matatagalan pa nga

kami. Hindi pa tapos ‘yung ginagawa roon, e,” Bianca pointed at the back of

the mansion.

“Ah, oo nga,” sinilip din ni Sevi. “Sasabihan nanaman kaming makupad, amp.”

“Okay. I’ll go na,” I smiled at them.

I kissed Sevi on the cheek before walking away. I rode a tricycle and then

booked a grab on my way back to the unit. I sighed heavily after placing the

paper bag on the table. Nilagay ko na lang sa ref ang pagkaing hinanda ko para

pwede pa mamaya. I felt lonely. Parang gusto kong maging engineer bigla. Mas

madalas pa nilang nakakasama si Sevi kaysa sa’kin.

I didn’t want to be clingy though. I just kept it all inside. Tinulog ko na

lang ‘yon at kinabukasan, kinalimutan ko na lang. When I woke up, I felt

Sevi’s arm around my waist. Oh, he’s here! I smiled and looked back at him. He

was sleeping so peacefully.

Dahan-dahan akong tumayo at lumabas para magluto ng breakfast. I placed it on

the table afterwards and sakto nagising siya. Lumabas siya ng kwarto at

niyakap ako patalikod habang hawak ko ang plato.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“For?” I raised a brow.

“Having not enough time.”

I nodded and smiled at him. “It’s okay.”

“Date tayo ngayong araw.”

I can’t believe I would be so happy to hear that. After breakfast, naligo

kaagad ako at nag-ayos. I decided to wear a white short dress and heels. I sat

on the bed while Sevi was braiding my hair. I giggled when I saw him looking

so serious.

“Ang hirap naman,” sumimangot siya.

“Math is harder than that. Kaya mo ‘yan,” I rolled my eyes.

Hindi masyadong maayos pero okay na. I giggled when I saw my hair in the

mirror. Sevi was putting on his white short-sleeved polo now. When he saw me

watching him, he leaned to give me a soft kiss. I smiled through the kiss and

pushed him lightly so he could get ready.

Sumakay kami sa BMW niya, or ni Luna technically. I didn’t know where we were

headed to. Palagi naman niyang hindi sinasabi. I just anticipated it more.

Nasa parking pa lang kami at hindi pa nakakaalis, nakatanggap na siya ng

tawag. He looked at me apologetically and I gave him a nod so he could answer

it. Napapikit ako nang mariin. I knew what will happen next.

“Bianca,” he answered. “Sunday ngayon. Hindi ba pwedeng bukas na lang ‘ya-

Ha?! Nabagsakan?! Pucha! Bakit?!”

I bit my lower lip and sighed heavily. Dahan-dahan kong kinuha ang bag ko at

binuksan ang pinto para makalabas na ng sasakyan.

“Wait lang. Eli!”

I started walking away from the car. I felt like I was going to burst. I felt

so many different emotions inside me and I really didn’t want to acknowledge

them so I just kept on walking.

“Eli, wait,” Sevi grabbed my arm lightly.

Tinanggal ko ang hawak niya at naglakad na lang ulit. I stopped again when he

held my wrist this time and pulled me so I could face him.

“Babe-”

“What?!” I was so mad. I was so frustrated. “What now, Sevi?!”

“I’m sorry, kailangan kong pumunta sa-”

“Then go!” I gestured using my hand. “Just go! Bakit nandito ka pa?!”

“I’m sorry. Babawi ako-”

“Narinig ko na ‘yan,” I cut him off. “You never did! You never fucking did,

Sevi! Nagmumukha na lang akong tanga, e!”

“Elyse naman,” he couldn’t let go of my wrist.

“I’ll go back to my dad’s house for a bit. I just.. want to rest. I want a

rest,” I massaged my head. “Mas mabuti pa buhay ko noong doon ako nakatira. I

never felt this tired before.”

“Pagod din naman ako,” binitawan niya ‘ko. “Napapagod din naman ako, ah? Pero

tinitiis ko lahat para sa pamilya ko tsaka para sa’yo. Para sa’tin. Hindi pa

ba sapat ‘yon?”

“Sevi, overtime ako sa work, uuwi ako para maglinis ng unit, magluto, at

maghintay sa’yo kahit hindi ka naman dumadating. I would sleep hoping that you

will be there the next day but you weren’t. Sunday. Sunday na lang day-off

nating dalawa pero wala pa rin? You still can’t give me time?” I sounded so

desperate.

“Alam mo namang marami akong ginagawa, diba? Hindi mo ba naiintindihan ‘yun?”

He asked calmly.

“Ako rin!” I yelled. “I work overtime so I could have money to pay for our

damn bills because you can’t! Ang sabi natin salitan tayo but you just.. You..

You let me pay for everything!”

“Hindi ko sinabing bayaran mo!” He shot back. “Tuwing tinatanong kita kung

magkano, sinasabi mong bayad mo na! Huwag mo namang ibalik sa’kin ‘yon! Kaya

ko namang bayaran, hindi mo lang talaga ako hinahayaan!”

“Because I wanted to help! You needed help-”

“Kung tulong ‘yon, hindi mo sana binabalik sa’kin ngayon!”

I bit my lower lip and stared at his eyes, trying to stop the tears from

falling down. I sighed heavily, giving up the argument. It was tiring.

“Let’s.. take a break. We need to take a break,” I said before walking away.

“Elyse, please, huwag naman,” he tried to stop me.

“We need it. You need it,” tears started falling from my eyes. “We’re so

tired.”

“Babalik ka naman.. diba?” He was trying to stop the tears from falling.

“Of course,” I nodded. “You can take this time to go home to your family. You

need them.”

He looked away and slowly nodded, nakatulala sa malayo. I sighed and gave him

a soft kiss before leaving.

I went back to our unit, crying while packing my things. I packed clothes that

were good for one week. I wasn’t moving out. I just wanted to take a break. I

wanted to clear my head off. Pakiramdam ko pareho na kaming hindi nakakapag-

isip nang maayos dahil sa pagod at pressure, but I still love him. I will

never stop loving him.

“Mommy,” I cried and hugged her when I saw her waiting for me outside the

house.

“Shh,” she hugged me back and caressed my hair. “It’s okay, baby.”

She looked thinner now and more pale. I didn’t want to see that. The doctor

said she was doing better but I couldn’t see it.

“You had a fight?” She asked.

I nodded, still crying.

“It’s okay. It will pass. Your love is greater than that,” she whispered on

me. “It’s better than that. When you’re tired, you can always rest.. but not

too long. Fix it before it crumbles down.”

“I just wanted a break.”

I went to my room after that. It was so comforting to lay down on my bed,

looking back at the memories I had here. I wanted to become a teenager again,

or a child. I did not sign up for this. Nakakapagod.

I looked at my phone when it beeped.

From: Sevi

I love you.

I sighed and placed it back on the desk. My mom called the company and

informed them that I will be resting for a week. Sevi would text me everyday,

giving me updates about his life. I would always smile after reading it.

From: Sevi

bebe, kasama ko si avi :) kakain lang kami

From: Sevi

inaasar ako ni yanna amp epal kala nila break na tayo hindi naman mangyayari

‘yon grr

I would usually not reply so he would know that I was still not yet ready to

talk to him. A week of break made me feel sane. I still worked from home,

though, pero hindi masyadong nakakapagod. I would swim during the afternoon or

jog around.

From: Sevi

i met hiro hahaha

I raised a brow. I stopped myself from asking further questions. I didn’t want

to break the streak. Ang tagal kong hindi nagreply sa kanya. Baka magselos

siya kapag nagreply ako kaagad dahil lang nabasa ko pangalan ni Hiro.

From: Sevi

piloto na pala siya hahaha kaso parang galit siya sa’kin :(

From: Sevi

may party si sam sa bgc kung gusto mo pumunta ito location huhu miss na kita

pls :(

I rolled my eyes and continued jogging. After that, I took a shower. Pinag-

isipan ko tuloy kung pupunta ba ‘ko o hindi. I really really missed him. I

wanted to see him.

“Mom, I’ll go to BGC lang,” paalam ko after getting ready.

“Take care!”

I was wearing a short black dress that was perfect for my body. I tied my hair

in a high ponytail and wore my diamond earrings and YSL heels. Black sling bag

lang ang dinala ko at nagpahatid na ‘ko kay Kuya Roel papunta sa club. It was

already kind of late, though.

When I arrived, si Sam kaagad ang nakita ko. Her eyes widened when she saw me.

“Omg, Eli! Hello!” She gave me a hug. “Oh no, I’m so sorry. Are you okay?”

“What?” My brows furrowed.

“Wait, I thought you guys have.. broken up?” She whispered the last two words.

“No, we just.. had a fight,” I chuckled. “Where is he?”

“Oh, really ba?! Sayang, kakauwi lang nila Yanna and Kierra. Anyway, Sevi’s

with Arkin. Hatid na kita,” she held my wrist.

Pagkapasok ko pa lang, amoy ko na ang alak. Sam invited so many people. I

could see a lot of familiar faces including the women I hated before. Giselle,

the model, was also there. Si Clea rin. Arkin’s little loveteam. ‘Yung

artista.

I stopped walking when I saw my brother. What the hell! Napalingon din si Sam

sa’kin at napahinto sa tapat ng table nila Kuya. He was with Hiro, Ate Helen,

and Ate Ericka. They were talking about something.

“Ericka, she’s fucking single. That was her friend!” Hiro said, frustrated.

“Eli!” Ate Helen stood up to greet me.

“Sam, you can go. I’ll just stay here for a bit,” I told her. She smiled at me before walking away. “I didn’t know you guys are here!”

“Why are YOU here?” My brother raised a brow.

“I’m looking for my boyfriend,” I answered proudly.

“Your boyfriend’s here?” Ate Ericka asked.

I looked around to find him. He was so easy to locate because he was with Arkin. When you see a flock of people taking pictures, definitely that’s Arkin. I smiled when I saw Sevi leaning on the railings, holding a glass of whiskey. He looked serious and bored.

“Yeah, there he is!” I pointed at Sevi.

“Where?” Ate Helen tried to find him.

“The one in black polo,” I told them.

“Oh, that man,” Ate Ericka nodded and suddenly stopped. “THAT MAN?!”

“Yeah, why?” I looked at her, confused.

“Hiro! The engineer is her boyfriend!” Ate Ericka pointed at Sevi.

Muntik nang masamid si Hiro sa iniinom niya. I got more confused. Ano bang

nangyayari?

“Wait, siya ba ‘yung sinasabi mo Ericka?” My brother asked and then he laughed

so hard. “What the fuck, you were talking about that guy?!”

“What is happening?” I asked again.

“Oh my gosh, pinagseselosan mo ‘yung.. boyfriend ni Elyse?” Ate Helen asked

Hiro.

“I didn’t know!” He defended himself.

“What? Pinagseselosan? Why?” Why can’t they just answer me?!

They did not answer. They just kept on laughing. Napailing na lang ako at

tinalikuran sila para pumunta sa side ni Sevi. He looked lonely and bored. I

stopped inches away from him and slowly hugged him from the back.

“The fuck, may girlfriend ak- Elyse!” His eyes widened when he saw me. He

panicked for a bit.

“Hi,” I gave him a small smile. “You’re taken? Aw, that’s sad. I was about to

ask you to.. come home sa condo ko.”

“Single ako. Tara,” he placed his hand on my shoulder and smirked.

“Ah, single ka na?” I raised a brow. “Did we break up ha? Did we?!”

“Taken,” he corrected. “Mali lang pagkakarinig mo.”

I rolled my eyes and got the glass of whiskey out of his hand so I could drink

it. Nilagok ko ‘yon at binalik sa kanya, naghahamon ang tingin. He smiled at

me and gave me a tight hug. I hugged him back and sighed.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Okay lang,” he hugged me tighter. “I’m sorry. I’ll do better. I’ll be better.

Huwag ka nang umalis ulit.”

“It’s okay,” I smiled when he let me go.

“Uwi na tayo,” he held my chin and gave me a soft kiss. “Uwi ka na sa’kin.”

:)

22

“Did you take a break?”

Sevi was combing my hair with his hand while hugging my waist with his other

hand. We were both laying down in our bed right after making love. Nakatalikod

ako sa kanya at sinusubukang matulog, just wearing my underwear.

“Oo, sabi mo magpahinga, diba?” He kissed my shoulder. “May binitawan akong

project pero okay lang. Kailangan ko huminga. Hindi naman major, e. May bago

kaming pinagkakaabahalan ni Luna.”

Yeah, I actually prefer Luna than Bianca.

“What will happen to your family?” I asked.

“Pumayag si Mama tawagan si Papa para humingi ng pera,” he sighed heavily.

“Kahit labag sa loob niya. Kailangan, e. Hindi ko kayang tustusan pati ‘yung..

isa pang kapatid. Sobra na ‘yon. Ang hirap na.”

“Your dad should be the one carrying these responsibilities that you have,” I

sighed too. “You’re young. You’re still young. You’re still striving.”

“Hindi na ‘ko aalis kapag Sunday. Uuwi na rin ako bago mag dinner, tapos

hahanap ako ng ibang paraan kung paano ako makakabayad sa’yo sa lahat ng

binayaran mo. Okay ba ‘yon?” He asked.

“There’s no need, Sevi. I’m so sorry I brought that up,” I felt so guilty

about it. Pakiramdam ko tumatak talaga sa kanya ‘yon. “Maybe I need to lower

my pride too and just.. ask my parents for help, don’t you think? They can

provide in an instant.”

“Ikaw,” he kissed my cheek. “Kung hindi labag sa loob mo.”

Yeah, maybe I should do that. I will ask for money to pay the remaining

balance of our unit and then extra money if we need it. He said I can help

him, that it was okay for me to help him. We really needed to swallow our

pride to survive. Alam ko rin na hindi madali sa kanyang guluhin ang Papa

niya. His dad already left them. He was already erased from Sevi’s concept of

family.

“Binigyan ako ng pera ni Sam, alam mo ba?” He chuckled.

Natawa ako sa sinabi niya. “Typical Sam.”

“Si Sam lang nakakaalam. Nakakahiya sa iba kong kaibigan. Baka magbigay din.

Hindi naman ‘to inuman para mag ambagan sila,” he laughed.

“Your mom fed them for years, right?” I remembered. “For sure they want to

help.”

The next morning, we went to work early. I asked my mom to just bring the

things I left home so umakyat ako at kinuha sa office niya. She was drinking

tea when I entered her office. Inalok pa niya ‘ko pero tumanggi ako.

“Mom,” I sighed and sat on the couch. “Can I.. ask for help?”

“Of course, dear,” she placed the cup back to the plate and looked at me,

waiting for me to say something. “What is it?”

“Our unit has remaining balance pa and my salary can’t cover everything,” I

pursed my lips. “Can I.. ask you for help?”

“Took you so long, huh,” she chuckled. “Of course, baby. Anything for you.

I’ll take care of that, don’t worry.”

“Thank you. Can I also ask for.. extra cash? I want to buy groceries, hehe,” I

lightly scratched my head.

“Look at you asking for grocery money,” she chuckled. “I’ll put some money in

your bank account but don’t tell your dad. Things will get really serious. You

know that.”

“Mommy, you’re the best!” I gave her a hug. “I love you so much.”

“And I love you more,” she hugged me back. “You are really still my big baby.”

“I promise I will work harder for this company,” I said with determination.

“For you, Mommy.”

“Don’t do it for me. Do it for yourself,” she held my hand and smiled. “So you

won’t lose your purpose when I’m gone.”

“Don’t say that.”

I went home early after that to buy groceries. That break really made me more

productive. Iba pala talaga ang nagagawa ng pahinga. Sevi and I needed that. I

was so glad he put some time for himself. Sana successful ang project nila ni

Luna.

I was trying to pick a cereal when a woman suddenly took my favorite cereal

box out of the shelf and placed it on my cart. My eyes widened when I looked

at her.

“Ida!” I immediately jumped to give her a hug.

“Wait, nasasakal ako!” She was laughing.

“Oh my god, fuck you, bitch!” I pulled her hair a little. “Why didn’t you tell

me that you were going home?!”

“I went here for business, okay?! Aalis din ako!” She laughed.

She looked taller now and more fit. She really started her healthy diet like

what she promised me before she left. Her hair was shorter now, hanggang taas

na lang ng balikat. She was wearing a business attire.

“How did you know kung nasaan ako?!” Oh my gosh, I felt so excited to see her

again.

“I asked your mom,” she shrugged. “Anyway, how are you? You were calling me

last week but I was asleep so what’s up?”

“Sevi and I had a huge fight but we’re okay now,” I shrugged and pushed my

cart.

“Oh no, is he okay?” She made a sad face.

“So you’re more worried about him?!” I glared at her.

“You did not slap him or anything, right?” She chuckled.

“No,” I shook my head.

“I heard workaholic ka na raw at hindi ka na nagpapakita sa mga tao. I told

you to make friends! You shouldn’t be alone! Mas nakakastress kapag jowa lang

ang mayroon ka!”

I missed Ida being talkative. Palagi siyang may valid point.

“Paano kapag naghiwalay kayo? Sinong sasandalan mo, ha?” She pinched my arm.

“If you guys break up, I will go straight home!”

“We won’t break up,” I chuckled.

Ida helped me with my groceries. Tinulungan niya pa ‘kong i-akyat hanggang sa

unit ko so we could catch up. I texted Sevi to inform him that Ida was here.

Baka magulat na lang siya mamaya, e.

“What?! You cook now?!” Ida was so dramatic she acted like she fainted on the

couch.

“Yeah, hindi pa ‘ko magaling, though,” I shrugged. “But I’m learning!”

“Sure ka hindi ako magkaka diarrhea dyan?”

“Nope,” I chuckled. “Diretso patay ka na rito.”

“Hoy, nakakatakot! Ayoko na! Mago-order na lang ako!”

She did not order, though. She waited for me to finish cooking at paminsan-

minsan, tinitikman niya para raw hindi sayang ang luto. Sakto dumating si Sevi

noong naghahain na ‘ko sa lamesa. I already informed him that Ida was here but

he still looked surprised to see my friend on the dining.

“Uy,” Sevi smiled. “Ikaw pala ‘yan. Hindi kita nakilala, ah. Nagpagupit ka?”

“Duh!” Ida laughed. “Ikaw din! I almost didn’t recognize you! Hindi ka kasi

naka basketball jersey, e.”

Sevi laughed at her before placing his things inside the study room. He was

unbuttoning his polo when he went out and gave me a kiss. Ida’s brows

furrowed, looking disgusted.

“Sana all!” Sigaw niya sa’min. “Sevi! Ako ba, wala?”

“Ida, bubuhusan kita ng sabaw, I swear,” I threatened.

“Shower lang ako. Ang dumi ko na. Galing ako sa site,” paalam niya. “Pwede na

kayo kumain, though.”

“Buti naman,” Ida laughed. “Gutom na ‘ko, e. Excited na ‘kong malason!”

“Uy, gumaling na nga si Eli magluto, e,” Sevi defended me.

“Siyempre you got used to the taste na. Hindi mo na napapansin,” Ida laughed

out loud to tease me more.

“Siguro nga,” Sevi joined in. “Ang lala pa rin nung carbonara.”

“Omg, true ‘yan. Hanggang ngayon, naiwan pa sa dila ko ang lasa,” Ida stuck

her tongue out a little.

“Hey, ang O.A mo, ha! Let’s just eat!” Pagpigil ko sa dalawang bully.

Ida stayed and we talked until 11 PM. When she left, the unit felt quiet

again. Sevi was busy in the study room so I just took a shower while waiting

for him. Kakasuot ko lang ng robe ko, pumasok na si Sevi sa shower. Kadalasan

kasi, hindi na kami naglolock. We were already that comfortable.

“Wow, fresh gulay,” he teased while getting his toothbrush on the side of the

sink.

Tumabi rin ako sa kanya at kinuha ang toothbrush ko. He was holding the

toothpaste so I asked him to put some on my brush.

“Toothbrush-an kita dali,” he laughed.

“What am I, a dog?” Sinamaan ko siya ng tingin.

“Dali na,” he got the toothbrush out of my hand.

I rolled my eyes and let him brush my teeth. It was so funny we just kept on

laughing. Para na kaming baliw sa kakatawa. I smiled more so he could brush

properly. He unconsciously mimicked my smile with his lips while brushing my

teeth so I laughed again.

“Ru ruk durmb,” I laughed.

I spit the liquid in my mouth so I could talk properly. I was still laughing

and holding onto the countertop. Hawak niya pa rin ang toothbrush ko.

“Ha?” He chuckled.

“Hatdog,” I answered back.

“Cheesedog.”

“Bulldog.”

“Footlong.”

“That did not even rhyme!” I laughed again.

“O talaga? Mumog ka muna.”

I rolled my eyes and got my toothbrush out of his hand so I could brush my

teeth again. Hindi niya naman ginawa nang matino, e! He brushed his teeth,

too, and then sabay na kaming nagsimula mag-skincare. I convinced him to wear

my facemask.

“Kikinis ako rito, ah?” He asked while his head was on my lap.

I was using my jade roller to flatten the mask on his face and to massage it.

Nakaupo ako sa kama at nakasandal sa headboard habang ang ulo niya ay nasa

binti ko. He was also wearing my pink ribbon headband.

“Makinis ka naman, ah,” I pointed that out. “You’re just stressed right now so

you need this.”

“Dapat ikaw din. Maduga ka,” he sounded like a kid. “Dapat ganituhin din kita.

Para mong binubulldozer mukha ko gamit ‘yang roller na ‘yan, e.”

“Hey, ang O.A mo, ha!” I laughed. “I’m massaging your face, okay? Don’t talk

to much! Nagugulo ‘yung facemask!”

“Kung mahal mo ‘ko, kiss mo ‘ko kahit may facemask,” paghahamon niya.

I leaned to give him a soft kiss. Lumayo rin ako nang matikman ko nang kaunti

‘yung lasang sabon. He laughed when he saw my reaction. Nagulo tuloy ‘yung

facemask kaya inayos ko ulit!

“Kasi naman! Don’t laugh too hard! Annoying naman, e!” I pouted while fixing

the sheet.

“Okay, hindi na,” he pursed his lips.

I massaged his face again with the roller. I just realized how perfect his

face was. Ang ganda lang. He was staring at me the whole time so I looked away

consciously.

“Don’t stare at me,” I rolled my eyes.

“Lagi naman kitang tinititigan, ngayon ka pa magrereklamo?”

“Why are you staring ba?” I raised my brows.

“Naisip ko lang..”

“What?”

“Mahal na mahal kita,” he gave me a small smile.

I bit the insides of my cheek so I wouldn’t smile too wide. I didn’t expect

him to say that. Kunwari na lang hindi ako kinikilig at pinagpatuloy na lang

ang pag-masahe sa mukha niya.

“I love you more,” I gave him another kiss.

The week went well. He did what he promised like going home before dinner and

staying during Sunday, but there was one night when he got home looking so

stressed again while talking to someone on the phone. Natahimik ulit ako

habang nakaupo sa couch.

“Ano ba naman ‘yan, Ma. Pati ba naman ‘yan, kailangan ako pa?” Sevi sat on the

couch, looking so frustrated. “Bakit hindi mo hanapin tatay nyan? Napaka

iresponsable naman nito, oh. Bakit ba kasi..” He sighed heavily.

I held Sevi’s hand to calm him down. He gave me a small assuring smile so I

gave it back to him.

“Anong fieldtrip nanaman ba? Kailangan ba ‘yan?” Sevi massaged the bridge of

his nose. “Hindi naman ‘yan kailangan. Ang sabi ko, kung ano lang ‘yung

kailangan, diba ‘yun lang ‘yung uunahin ko? Tsaka nasaan na ba si Papa?

Sumagot na ba?”

He stared at the wall for a moment before pulling his hair in frustration. He

sighed again. No matter how annoyed and frustrated he was, he still refused to

shout at his mother.

“Hinanap mo ba talaga? Sabi mo sumagot na tapos ngayon sasabihin mong hindi

pa? Ano ba ‘yan? Kasama ba sa pagbubuntis ‘yung pagsisinungaling?”

I chuckled but stopped because he was looking too serious.

“Anong ayaw mo lang akong guluhin? Oo nga, nag-quit na ‘ko sa project na ‘yon

kaya maluwag na oras ko pero sabihin mo kasi ‘yung totoo kasi kung hindi nga

sumasagot si Papa, malamang kailangan ko humanap ng paraan. Hindi naman kasi

‘to biro, e,” Sevi inhaled a large amount of breath.

I stood up and prepared our food, pero kahit hanggang dining naririnig ko pa

rin ang boses niya. He was talking so calmly but his body language was saying

otherwise. He was still in control of his emotions, but I think too much

stress can mess it up like what happened to us last time.

“Bebe, eat na,” I smiled at him after I saw him ending the call.

He stood up and walked towards my direction. Akala ko uupo na siya pero

nagulat ako dahil niyakap niya ‘ko nang mahigpit. I hugged him back and tapped

his back to comfort him.

“I already paid for our unit and my mom also gave me money so you don’t need

to worry about our bills anymore. You can focus on your family,” I told him.

“I love you,” he whispered.

“I love you,” I smiled. “Let’s eat na.”

The next morning, he went to work early but he left a sticky note on my forehead. Napailing kaagad ako at tinanggal ‘yon. It was blocking my view a

bit.

Baby,

Off to work early. I cooked breakfast.

Kain mabuti. I’ll see you later :)

- Hubby (jk practice lang)

I was smiling the whole day because of that. Oh, the little things that made me happy. I was really feeling good until Austin entered my office again. I still couldn’t forget what he said last time. Sobrang weird niya.

“What?” I raised a brow.

“Why are you so mad?” He chuckled before placing the folders on my desk.

“Maybe you had a fight with your boyfriend, huh?”

“No,” tanggi ko kaagad at kinuha ang folders.

“Thought so,” he shrugged. “What a strong couple, huh?”

“You can leave now. Thank you,” I said in a monotone.

Good thing he left after that only with a teasing smile on his face. I rolled my eyes and went back to work. During lunch time, I went up to my mom’s office. She said she wanted to have lunch with me for some reason.

“Are you taking care of yourself, Mommy?” I asked while we were eating. Her

personal nurse was there, watching her.

“Of course I am, sweetheart,” she chuckled.

“Good,” I nodded.

“Can you already live without me, Eli?” She asked, smiling.

I stopped eating to look at her. I was dumbfounded for a moment. Natulala ako,

iniisip pa lang kung anong mangyayari sa’kin kapag nawala siya. I would

probably go nuts. I haven’t dealt with.. death.. yet.

“Stop saying that,” I shook my head, still in denial.

“You’re still a big baby, huh,” she held my hand with both of her hands. “You

know.. When you were young, you used to cry a lot. Really really a lot. There

was one time I heard you scream ‘Mommy! Mommy!’ so loud I rushed down the

stairs, almost falling, only to see you crying because a butterfly landed on

your shirt.”

I smiled at her. She looked so happy reminiscing that. She was right, though.

When I cry, I always go to her. She knew my vulnerable side and she always

knew how to comfort me. She was my bestfriend. I never left her side ever since I was born.

“But you grew up as a strong lady,” she gave me a smile, tears started forming at the corner of her eyes. “And.. I just.. feel so proud that you’re not that crybaby I knew before.”

“I just cried last week, Mommy,” I looked away to stop my tears from falling.

“I’m still a cry baby so you can’t leave this cry baby behind yet. I’m not ready yet.”

“Oh, Elyse,” she gave me a hug. “Of course you will cry. You will still cry a lot but you will get over it, like how you used to cry back then because you fell on the ground and I was nowhere to be found.. so you tried to cure your wound alone. Parang ganoon lang naman ang mangyayari, anak.”

“Stop it. I don’t want to hear it,” I bit my lower lip and tried to continue eating. She was like bidding her farewell. I wasn’t ready for that yet. I didn’t think I would be.

“I love you,” she smiled at me.

I tried so hard to finish my lunch without overthinking it but the whole day, my brain was so occupied with so many thoughts about my mom. She was doing

well, right? That’s what the doctor said. She was taking her meds so it was

fine.

It was around 5 PM when I arrived home. I showered and wore my pajamas before

laying down on the bed, not having the energy to cook or even clean the house.

I just looked at the ceiling and thought deeply.

Tumayo lang ako nang marinig ko si Sevi na dumating. Lumabas ako ng kwarto at

sumilip sa kanya. He smiled at me when he saw me. I was about to hug him but

his phone suddenly rang.

“Work?” Nagtatampong tanong ko.

“Si Steven,” he looked more confused.

Tumalikod siya sa’kin saglit para sagutin ang tawag. It looked urgent. Steven

never called him.

“Ano?! Magsalita ka nang maayos, hindi ko maintindihan!” My eyes widened when

I heard Sevi’s loud shout.

I bit my finger and looked at him in a worry. I saw how his expression

changed. Kung kanina galit siya, ngayon napuno ng takot at pag-alala ang mukha

niya.

“Anong dugo?! Magsalita ka nang maayos, pucha!” Sevi got his bag again in a

rush. “Papunta na ‘ko! Humingi ka ng tulong! Huwag mong iiwan si Sofia dyan!”

Hindi na siya nakapagpaalam sa’kin at tuloy-tuloy lang tumakbo paalis. My lips

parted, getting more worried. I texted him about it but he didn’t reply. Hindi

ako nakatulog kakaisip kung anong nangyari.

Hindi rin siya umuwi. Wala akong tulog kakahintay sa kanya.

Bigla ko na lang napansin na umaga na pala so I went straight to the shower

after eating toasted bread. My mind was too occupied so I just wore a simple

pencil skirt and maroon blouse. I was hoping for Sevi to come home that

morning but he didn’t so I just went to work.

“Elyse, let’s go. Opening nung bagong hotel,” Austin reminded me.

“Yeah, okay,” I stood up and fixed my things.

Pagkakuha ko ng phone ko, tinext ko ulit si Sevi, hoping that he will reply.

To: Sevi

Hi love I’m getting worried so please text back if you have time. I love you.

Tinago ko na ang phone ko sa bag at lumabas na ng office. Nakasalubong ko si

Mommy at Daddy sa elevator kasama si Austin. They were heading out to the

hotel, too. Sasabay na lang ako sa kotse nila Mommy.

“Did you do a final check, Eli?” My dad asked.

“Yes, Dad,” I nodded.

When the elevator opened, I let them leave first. Sumunod na lang ako sa

kanila, sa tabi ko si Austin. My eyes widened when a man suddenly grabbed the

collar of my dad. Everyone stopped walking.

“Anong ginawa mo kay Mama?!” Sevi yelled so loud. His eyes were bloodshot.

“Sevi!” I shouted and ran to stop him.

“Putang ina mo, anong ginawa mo sa nanay ko?!” Sevi still wouldn’t let go of

my dad!

“What the hell is happening?!” I tried to touch him but I couldn’t when I saw

how mad he was. Tears started forming at the corner of his eyes. All I saw was

madness and pain. I never saw him like this before.

“‘Yung bata..” Sevi cried. “..wala na.”

Wala na?

My lips parted when I realized that he was talking about his mother’s baby.

The baby. My mom looked so shocked and confused. She was staring at my dad

with wide eyes, asking for an explanation. Austin looked so surprised, too. He

couldn’t talk.

I felt dizzy. I had a hard time breathing with my heart beating so fast.

“I don’t know what you’re saying,” my dad tried to force Sevi’s hands to let

go of him.

“Oh my god!” My knees fell on the floor when he suddenly punched my dad.

The security was already running towards us, pulling Sevi away from my dad. I

was so shocked, I didn’t know where to go first. My dad’s lips got busted but

he still managed to smirk.

“Binastos mo nanay ko!” Sevi kept on yelling. “Tao ka pa ba?! Paano mo

nagagawang ngumiti habang.. habang ‘yung.. Mama ko.. nawalan ng anak?”

“Alfred,” my mom started crying. “What did you..”

Austin helped my dad up. I was still standing in the middle of my dad and

Sevi, not knowing what to do.

“Panagutan mo nangyari kay Mama..” Sevi tried to go to my dad again. “Para mo

na rin siyang pinatay.. Para mo na rin kaming pinatay..”

“Sevi, stop it!” I started crying, too. It was too much. Everything happening was too much for me.

“Ang laki laki ng respeto ko sa’yo..” Sevi sobbed. “Hindi ko alam na tinatarantado mo na pala nanay ko sa likod ko. Putangina, paano.. Paano mo nagagawa ‘yon?!”

“Elyse!” Austin yelled. “Your mom!”

My eyes widened when I saw my mom on the floor, unconscious. My hands started shaking when I tried to touch her body, panicking. I covered my mouth as tears started falling.

“Call an ambulance, please! Please!” I yelled, crying. “Please! Help! Someone! Please!”

I stood up and asked for help. Austin was already on his phone, calling for help. Sevi stopped when he saw my mom on the floor. I walked towards him with bloodshot eyes. Hindi ko na alam ang tumatakbo sa isipan ko. There were too many emotions inside me. They were overflowing.

“Elyse-”

I slapped him.

“How dare you do this to me..” I cried.

“I’m sorry,” he looked at me with so much emotions.

“Get him away from me, please,” I begged the security.

Sevi looked at me like he was giving up. He looked at me like he was accepting

his defeat. Binawi niya ang braso niya sa dalawang lalaking may hawak sa kanya

at siya na ang naglakad palabas.

I couldn’t think straight anymore. The next thing I knew, I was rushing my mom

to the hospital. I was holding her hand in the ambulance, crying.

“Mommy, please,” I cried. “Please don’t leave me, please.. I can’t.. I can’t

live without you.. Mommy please..”

I wanted to beg every saint to save my mom. I wanted to beg the doctors, the

nurses, everyone.

“Mommy,” I cried. “You’re.. all I have. Please.”

She looked pale in front of me. Her hand was cold and she was barely breathing

anymore. Hindi na ‘ko makahinga kakaiyak.

My dad was getting his lips treated while I was waiting outside the emergency

room, still crying. I didn’t know what to think. I just wanted my mom to be safe.

“Elyse!” Ida ran to me and hugged me. “Shush..”

I cried on her chest the whole time. I did not stop. Parang hindi nauubos ang luha sa katawan ko habang naghihintay.

“Ida, hindi ko kaya..” I cried more.

“You can do this. I’m with you. I’m with you,” Ida whispered on me.

Napatayo lang kaming dalawa nang lumabas ang doctor. My heart started beating fast when the doctor sighed heavily.

“I’m sorry,” the doctor said.

“Elyse..”

I fell on the floor. My hands and lips were shaking. I felt dizzy. Hindi ko alam ang iisipin ko. My vision became blurry all of a sudden.

“No,” I shook my head and stood up again to grab the doctor by his sleeve.

“No, she’s.. she’s not dead, right? She’s alive, right?”

“I’m sorry, Miss Ledezma. With her weak body, it was already impossible for her to survive during the operation-”

“No!” I screamed and tried to go inside the emergency room but Ida stopped me.

“No, please, she’s alive! She’s not dead! She’s not!”

“Elyse,” Ida cried, hugging me.

“Ida, she’s not dead. She would never leave me like this. She.. She..” I broke

down. “She said.. she will always be here..”

“Shush, love..” Ida sobbed.

I fell on the floor again, crying.

“Mommy,” I whispered, closing my eyes. “It hurts so much..”

I couldn’t imagine myself waking up tomorrow with her gone. I couldn’t imagine

myself going to her office and not seeing her around. I couldn’t imagine it. I

couldn’t imagine her gone.

I was with her.. almost everyday.. for years.

I couldn’t deal with the sudden change. My heart couldn’t take it.

She supported me in everything. She comforted me when I cried. She celebrated

my success with me, and even my loss. She protected me and never left my side

for years. I couldn’t.. I couldn’t let her go now. I can’t.

“Mommy,” I cried again. “I’m sorry..”

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23

TW: harassment, self-harm, abuse

“Elyse, kumain ka muna.”

I shook my head, still staring at the white coffin in front of me. I stared at it for so long I didn’t notice the tears flowing through my face.

“Eli, please. Just eat or at least drink water. Madedehydrate ka nyan,” Ida still tried to give me the bowl of soup.

She did not get the response from me. I just stood up and walked slowly towards the coffin. My lips started to shake again when I saw my mom lying there in her white dress, looking so peaceful. I put my hand on the glass. I could only caress her face from there.

“Mommy,” I cried again. “Wake up..”

She looked so peaceful, but her death wasn’t. That made me mad. The rage I felt was overflowing inside of me. She died with so many questions inside her head. She died with a broken heart.

“Eli,” my dad tried to hold my arm.

“Don’t touch me!” I yelled so loud everyone went silent.

I looked at my dad with so much anger my heart hurt. Tears started to flow

because of too much madness, setting aside the pain I was feeling because of

my mother’s death.

“Don’t you dare touch me!” I pointed at his face. “You disgust me! You disgust

me so bad I want to fucking kill myself!”

“Elyse,” dad sighed. “Don’t do this here. We’re in your mother’s wake.”

“Her wake.. Her wake!” I cried again. “This wouldn’t have happened if you

just.. If you just.. tried to become a decent human being!”

“No, this wouldn’t have happened if your boyfriend did not-”

“Fuck you both!” I yelled. “Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck all of you!”

“Elyse,” Ida tried to stop me. “You need to rest.”

“Do not disrespect me like that. We will talk at home,” my dad sounded mad.

Ida grabbed me by my arm and pulled me out of the room to escape the stares of

the people who came to my mother’s wake. She opened the back door of our car

and tried to get me inside.

“We will go home first so you can take a rest. You haven’t slept for 2 days,”

Ida sat beside me.

Kuya Roel started the engine and glanced at me through the mirror with his

apologetic eyes. I looked outside the window with my fist shaking out of

anger. I could never sleep peacefully knowing that my mom’s death could have

been prevented if only.. if only they just..

“Elyse, try to get some sleep, okay?” Ida reminded me.

I used the back of my hand to wipe the tears away. I just remained quiet,

watching the movement of the car. I thought of opening the door and jumping. I

thought of running away and getting myself hit with the car. I thought of so

many things.

“Oh my god,” Ida whispered when the car stopped in front of our house.

I looked outside the window and saw Sevi there, waiting. Hindi ko alam kung

gaano na siya katagal doon. I never visited the house ever since my mom died.

He looked tired. He stood up when he saw the car approaching.

“Elyse, don’t,” Ida tried to stop me from opening the door.

But it was too late. I pushed the door open and went out of the car to walk

towards him. He looked at me like he was prepared to handle my emotions. I

stopped in front of him and stared at him, gritting my teeth.

“Why are you here?” I swallowed the lump in my throat.

He sighed. “Gusto ko lang malaman kung okay ka-”

I slapped him again. Nag-unahan muli ang mga luha ko sa pagbagsak.

“You think so?!” I yelled.

Sevi’s face turned a little to the side after my slap. His jaw moved

aggressively before looking at me again with anger and pain in his eyes.

“My mom died in front of me..” I covered my mouth with my shaking hands.

“She.. She died.. in front of me..”

“I’m sorry,” Sevi looked away, trying to stop the tears from falling.

“And you.. you had the FUCKING guts to appear in front of our house to check

if I’m doing okay?” My voice broke. “After what you did? After screaming and

punching my dad in front of my mom? You.. you knew she was sick, Sevi. You

knew. You fucking knew!”

“Hindi ko alam,” Sevi tried to defend himself.

“Her heart was weak!” I hit his chest with my fist. “She was sick! She died a

painful death because of what you did! Because of what you fucking did! Now

she’s gone.. She’s..”

Sevi caught my wrists while I cried helplessly. My whole body became weak I

couldn’t resist his grip anymore. I was just crying in front of him like a

desperate woman while he was looking at me like he pitied me.

“She’s gone,” I cried again.

“Namatay din ang kapatid ko, Elyse,” Sevi let my wrists go. “Sinira ng tatay

mo ang pamilya ko!”

I shook my head, not wanting to hear anything anymore.

“Naiintindihan mo?! Sinira ng tatay mo ‘yung pamilya ko! Binastos niya ang

nanay ko! Namatay ang bata sa loob ng tyan niya dahil sa tatay mo! Putangina,

niloko niya ‘yung mama mo.. Niloko niya ‘yung mama mo!” He shouted.

“Stop it,” I tried to cover my ears after he mentioned my mom.

“O ano? Anong gagawin mo?” Sevi’s eyes were bloodshot. “Sasampalin mo ‘ko

ulit?”

“Stop it!”

“Sampalin mo ‘ko! Saktan mo na ‘ko! Namanhid na ‘ko pagkatapos kong makitang

duguan ‘yung nanay ko, kaya sampalin mo ‘ko! Gawin mo na lahat sa’kin! Wala na

‘kong pakialam!” He tried to hold my wrist so I could hit him.

“Stop it!” Sinubukan kong bawiin ang kamay ko habang umiiyak. “Please..”

“Bakit ayaw mong marinig?” Sevi’s voice broke. “Hindi ka ba naniniwala

sa’kin?”

“My dad cheated with your mom!” I looked at him and pushed his chest. “Why are

you putting all the blame on my dad?!”

“Hindi ginusto ng nanay ko ang nangyari! Kinailangan niyang panatilihin ang

trabaho niya para sa pamilya ko! Alam mo ‘yan, Elyse! Bakit ba sinasarado mo

ang isip mo?!” Sevi shouted in frustration.

“And how are you so sure, huh?!” I cried again, screaming at him. “How are you

so sure that your mom was telling the truth?!”

“Ano?” Sevi’s lips parted in disbelief. The disappointment in his face was so

evident. “Putangina! Seryoso ka ba?!”

“I don’t fucking know! I don’t fucking know!” I held my head. “I hate all of

you! You killed my mom! Fuck you! You should have killed me instead!”

“Elyse,” Sevi’s eyes were filled with worry.

“Enough,” Ida grabbed my arm and glanced at Sevi. “Please. She’s still in

shock. Both of you should stop.”

Ida pulled me inside and went straight to my room. Tinulungan niya ‘kong

humiga pagkatapos niya ‘kong painumin ng tubig. I just cried and cried until I

dozed off to sleep.

I woke up in total darkness. I reached for the lamp on my side table and

turned it on. It was already 11 PM. I haven’t eaten anything. I just drank

water so I wouldn’t feel dehydrated.

I looked below my bed when I heard a noise. My lips parted when Jewel suddenly

ran to me and rested herself on my lap. My face heated as tears started to

form again at the corner of my eyes. I caressed Jewel’s head while crying.

Everything just reminded me of my mom.

I remembered her going home, holding a puppy that she rescued from the storm.

Basang basa ang damit niya pati ang buhok niya. She said she heard the puppy

crying and she couldn’t leave it after giving her food so she brought it home.

I was scared of dogs back then so my relationship with Jewel wasn’t that good.

But whenever Mommy would leave me alone in the house, she would always say

that Jewel will be there to protect me.. that I wouldn’t feel alone because

Jewel would stay with me. And she did.

Hindi ko na napansing tumutulo na ang luha ko sa kamay ko. I smiled by myself

when Jewel licked the tears away from my hand. She looked at me like she was

comforting me. I carried her to my bed so I wouldn’t feel alone.

“Thank you, baby,” I whispered, running my hand through her body.

I tried to sleep again. I woke up around 9 AM with Jewel beside me. Nang

bumaba ako mula sa kama ay gumising din siya at sumunod sa’kin hanggang sa

lumabas ako at bumaba ng hagdan. I tried to get a glass of water but when I

entered the kitchen, memories of my mom came back to me, I started tearing up

again.

“Mommy, I can slice the apple,” I said while getting the small knife.

“Be careful, Eli,” mom said while washing the vegetables.

I wanted to show her that I knew how to use the knife. I placed the apple in a

plate and held it with my other hand before slicing it into half.

“Ouch!” I held my finger. The knife fell on the floor.

“Elyse!” Mom immediately ran to me to see my bleeding finger. “Oh my god, I

told you to be careful!”

She washed the blood off the little wound on my finger before pulling me

towards the living room. Sapilitan niya ‘kong pinaupo roon at kumuha ng first

aid kit. I gave her an awkward smile when she looked at me with anger.

“I told you! I already told you!” She shook her head before disinfecting my

wound.

“Ouch, Mommy,” I wanted to cry. “I’m hurt.”

“What were you thinking?!” She looked at me again.

“I just.. wanted to show you that I can.. cut.. fruits,” I looked away,

getting embarrassed. “You always say na I don’t know how to do anything in the

kitchen so..”

“Oh, honey,” she sighed heavily. “I’m sorry. You didn’t have to.. cut your

finger to prove something.”

“I did not cut my finger!” Reklamo ko. “It was just a mistake, okay?”

“Does it hurt?” My mom asked after putting a band aid around my finger.

I nodded.

“Of course. Mistakes can hurt, right?” She chuckled. “But you will learn from

it. Everything you do doesn’t have to be perfect. But next time, do it better,

okay? There’s always a second chance.”

“You don’t have a second chance after death, Mom,” I joked.

“Well,” she nodded. “Maybe in your next life.. Or your next next life.. Or maybe if heaven really exists, you will find your chance there. Always.”

I blinked and she was gone. I was just left all alone in the kitchen, holding a glass of water. I looked away and placed the glass on the table. My hands became weak after crying so hard. Ngayon, umiiyak nanaman ako.

“Jewel, do you think mom’s happy with her next life?” I asked.

I hope so. I really hope so. She did not deserve this. She gave my father a second chance but look what he did to her. Not everyone deserves a second fucking chance. It’s just like giving a person another chance to hurt you again.

Ida wasn’t around. She probably came to work. Hindi naman ito ang inuwi niya

rito kundi business. I felt bad for her.

“Jewel, time to eat,” I said after preparing her dog food.

I placed her bowl on the floor before walking outside the kitchen. Aakyat na sana ako sa kwarto ko pero narinig ko si Daddy na paparating. I stopped and

waited for him to enter the house.

“Elyse,” he said when he saw me. “You and I need to talk.”

He sounded mad but I did not feel any ounce of regret from what I said and did

to him yesterday. He deserved it.

I continued walking until I reached the door of his study room. I went inside

and crossed my arms over my chest, waiting for him. I did not bother to look

back when I heard his footsteps inside.

He went to his desk and leaned on it, waiting for me to talk but I did not. I

just stared at him with so much anger.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?” He raised a brow.

“Why did you do that?” I gritted my teeth.

“What are you talking about?”

“Why did you cheat on her?!” I raised my voice.

“Elyse, look,” he sighed. “I did not cheat on your mother, okay? How could I

do that? I love your mom-”

“How could you do that?” I repeated. “You cheated on Shan’s mom with my mom!

Of course you can do that!”

“Your boyfriend really influenced you that bad, huh?” He shook his head. “‘Yan

ba ang sinabi niya sa’yo? Pwes, hiwalayan mo na ‘yun dahil hindi ko inakalang

kaya niyang magsinungaling sa ganoong bagay.”

“What are you saying?!” I was so confused.

“Elyse, I could never cheat on your mom. Selene clearly seduced me out of

desperation. She probably wanted my money because she became poor after her

husband left him,” my dad shrugged.

“How could you..” I scoffed. “How could you lie like that?!”

“You don’t believe your own dad, Elyse?” He looked hurt. “I raised you for

years like a princess. Have I ever done anything that could hurt you or your

mom? Because of that liar secretary of mine, your mom died. You should blame

your boyfriend’s family, not me,” he looked so serious.

“Please,” I started crying. “Please don’t lie to me like this.. Please, I want

to know the truth. I want to know your side so don’t lie to me, Dad..”

“Elyse, sweetheart,” he walked towards me and touched my shoulders. “I never

lied to you. I am your dad. How can I lie to you? Your mom and I raised you

well. We treated you well.. What more do you want? Didn’t I earn your trust?”

I was so confused. I held my head and closed my eyes. I didn’t know what to

think. I was trying to remember everything Sevi said.

“You harassed her, didn’t you?!” I looked at my dad. “You harassed her!”

“I did not! She seduced me. Elyse, please, just listen to me,” he tried to

touch me again but I stepped backwards.

“You’re an abuser!” I screamed.

“Elyse-”

“You’re lying! You’re a liar!”

“For fuck’s sake, Elyse!” He began shouting.

“You abused your power! You cheated on my mom.. You manipulative bastard! I

can’t even look at you anymore!” I pointed at his face.

“What did you call me?!”

“You’re fucking disgusti-” He slapped me.

He went to his desk and got his golf club. I heard Jewel’s bark behind me

while I was crying so hard everything became blurry.

“You disrespectful child!” My dad shouted as he was marching towards me with

so much anger. “How dare you disrespect your father like this?!”

I cried when he hit my knee with the golf club. Jewel was still barking. I

closed my eyes, preparing for another hit but it did not come. I heard a loud

noise like someone fell on the floor.

“Fucking asshole!”

My eyes widened when I saw my brother in front of me, gripping my dad’s collar

like he was ready to kill. His eyes were bloodshot. They were filled with

rage. My dad’s lips bled after receiving a hard punch.

“Don’t fucking touch her,” Shan gritted his teeth.

“Kuya,” I cried, wanting to pull his arm away. “Stop, please..”

My brother stood up, leaving my dad on the floor.

“I will fucking destroy you. Remember that.”

He glanced at me before dragging me away from the room. Jewel followed us from

behind but she was having a hard time because of her small legs so I stopped

to carry her. My brother opened the door of his car, gesturing me to go

inside.

I was still crying inside the car, hugging my dog. Tahimik lang si Kuya na

nagdadrive paalis, mahigpit ang hawak sa manibela. He looked scary but I knew

he won’t do anything that could harm me.

“Where are your things? Did you leave anything important in the house?” He

asked after the long silence.

Umiling ako. Lahat ng gamit ko nasa condo na namin ni Sevi. That made me cry

more.

“Nasa condo, Kuya,” I cried again.

“Get your things,” seryosong sabi ni Kuya.

I just gave him a slow nod, secretly hoping that Sevi wouldn’t be there. When

the car stopped in front of the lobby, I left Jewel with my brother before

leaving the car. I saw myself in the reflection of the elevator. I looked so

tired. I looked different.

When the elevator stopped, I slowly walked my way towards our unit. I stopped

in front of the door and inhaled a large amount of breath before opening it.

I looked around and saw no one inside. I sighed before getting all my bags. I

placed it on the floor of our walk-in closet. I started putting my clothes

inside. I cried again, remembering how Sevi and I used to fix our things

together.

After getting all my clothes, bags, and shoes, I closed the luggage and went

to the bathroom to get my essentials. I bit my lower lip, trying to stop the

tears from falling. We used to do our skincare together.. brush our teeth

together..

I shook my head and stepped outside the bathroom, holding my kit. I stopped

when I saw Sevi standing outside our walk-in closet, looking at my luggage.

Napalunok ako bago siya nilagpasan para kuhanin ang mga bagahe ko.

“Elyse,” he grabbed my arm lightly to stop me.

Hindi ako nagsalita. Sinubukan kong bawiin ang braso ko pero ayaw niya ‘kong

pakawalan. I glared at him, trying to stop my tears.

“Let me go,” madiing sabi ko.

“Elyse, please, huwag naman ganito..” His eyes shined when it reflected on the

light, a sign that he was about to cry.

“Let me go,” binawi ko ang braso ko.

I was about to get my luggage when he suddenly stood in front of me, trying to

stop me. I looked at him with exhausted eyes. I really really wanted to leave

now. I felt so tired.

“Sevi, please,” I begged, tears started to flow.

“Babe, huwag ka naman umalis, oh,” he started crying. “Pag-usapan natin.

Pinag-uusapan naman natin ‘yung mga problema natin, e.. Huwag naman ganito.”

“Sevi, please!” I shouted, hitting his chest with the kit. “Please..” I cried.

The bottles from the kit sprawled on the floor so I knelt to pick them again

while crying. My vision was so blurry but I saw Sevi picking it up for me. I

stood up again, expecting him to give me back the kit but he didn’t.

“Please, akin na,” I swallowed hard.

“Hindi ka pwedeng umalis,” he shook his head. “Ayusin natin ‘to.”

“Putangina naman, Sevi!” I covered my face so he wouldn’t see me crying so

hard. “Fuck..”

He tried to touch my wrist but I pushed him away. He swallowed hard and looked

away, getting mad.

“Why can’t you just let me leave?” My voice broke.

“Tangina,” he whispered, trying to wipe his tears away with his hand. “Mahal

kita, e.”

“I’m so tired.. I’m so tired!” I pulled my hair with my hands. “I’m so

exhausted! I want to breathe!”

“Ako rin naman..” He said softly. “Pagod na rin naman ako.. Pagod na pagod din

ako pero.. Ikaw ‘yung pahinga ko, e.. Tangina, tapos iiwan mo rin ako?”

I did not talk. Tinalikuran ko lang siya at sinubukang hatakin ang dalawang

maleta paalis pero hinawakan niya ulit ang braso ko. Mabilis kong binawi sa

kanya ‘yon. His grip was loose. His hands were weak.

“I’m sorry.. Sorry.. I’ll do better.. Magtatrabaho ako nang maigi para kumita

ng mas malaking pera.. Ako na magluluto.. Ako na rin maghuhugas.. Ano pang

gusto mo? Ako na magbabayad ng lahat, huwag mo lang ako iwan, please,” he

cried.

“Stop it,” I cried, too.

“Sorry sa mga nasabi ko.. Sorry sa lahat ng ginawa ko.. Please..”

I couldn’t look at him without remembering his mom. I felt so ashamed. I think

he forgot everything about it for a moment when he saw me leaving. Hindi na

niya naalala kung gaano kasahol ang tatay ko.

“Elyse, tangina naman, huwag naman kasi ganito,” Sevi covered his face, still

crying. “Maglilimang taon na tayo.”

“I want to get away from here. Can’t you understand that?” I looked at him. “I

can’t.. I can’t work in our company anymore. I will leave.. I will start a new

life..”

“Nang wala ako?” He asked desperately.

“I can’t look at you anymore,” I looked away.

“Hindi na ‘ko kasama sa mga plano mo?” His lips parted.

“All of you.. All of you are so.. so fucking exhausting,” I sobbed. “I want to rest.. I need to rest.. I need to take a break.. Can’t you just give it to me?”

“Napapagod ka na sa’kin?” He asked again.

I closed my eyes for a moment before nodding, biting my lower lip.

“I’m sorry,” Sevi slowly nodded. He looked defeated. “Mukha na ‘kong tanga, putangina.. Sorry ako nang sorry sa’yo pero.. kahit isang sorry hindi mo mabigay sa’kin.”

I did not talk. Kinuha ko lang ang dalawang bagahe ko at hinatak palabas.

“Mahal mo ba ‘ko?”

I stopped walking.

“Sagutin mo ‘ko.”

I bit my lower lip. Tuloy-tuloy na tumulo ang luha ko kahit anong pigil ko.

Sinubukan kong punasan bago lumingon sa kanya.

“Yes,” I whispered.

“Pero pinagdudahan mo lahat ng sinabi ko.. Mas kinampihan mo ‘yung tatay mo.. Tangina, ngayon ko lang naalala..” He laughed sarcastically. “Oo nga. Mas mahalaga nga ang pamilya, Elyse.”

“You should rest,” I told him.

“Mas mahal ko pamilya ko,” Sevi looked away.

“Yes,” I nodded. “So you should hate me. I called your mother a liar..”

“‘Yun ba ang gusto mo?” He looked at me with tears in his eyes.

“I want to leave,” I clearly said.

“Sige, umalis ka na,” he pursed his lips.

“I’m sorry,” I cried.

“Umalis ka na,” his jaw moved aggressively. “Please.”

I nodded before pulling my luggage again. When I reached the parking, I broke

down. My knees fell on the floor as I covered my mouth to stop my sobs.

I was dead. I felt dead. I just wanted to live again.

“Eli,” my brother held my arm to help me stand up.

“Kuya,” I cried on his chest.

He embraced me as I cried, trying so hard to calm me down. I felt so tired

from all the pain I was feeling. I cried and cried until there were no tears

left.

“I’m going to get you out of here, okay?” He whispered.

.

“Mommy, I’m leaving.”

I sat on the monoblock beside her. I couldn’t attend her funeral because my father was there and I didn’t want to see him anymore so I just waited until it was over and everyone was gone.

“I decided to leave,” I sighed heavily. “I feel so.. so ashamed. I wanted to start a new life.. I want to save my mental health, Mommy..”

Ilang araw na ‘kong umiiyak. Wala nang lumalabas na luha sa mga mata ko, but I could still feel pain. All I could ever feel was pain. Wala nang galit. Sakit na lang ang nararamdaman ko.

“I can’t stay here anymore,” I bit my lower lip. “Kuya’s already taking care of my papers.. I will go with Ida. I will work at their company abroad until.. until I finally feel like I’m living again.. Everything was so sudden.”

I felt dead. I felt so tired having my goals all set in front of me. My life with Sevi was so amazing but at the same time, I felt tired for always trying to achieve more. Maybe I was really too young.

“I will come back and visit you again. I love you, Mommy,” I smiled by myself.

I went back to the car where my brother was waiting. He refused to leave the car and see my mom’s coffin below the ground. He said it was too much for him.

He was full of regret. He said he could have prevented it.

I also thought of that. I could have prevented it.. but it happened already. I shouldn’t be bothered by the things I can’t control anymore. I will look forward. I will live my life for myself this time.

I stayed in my brother’s condo for a week until I saw him leaving in a formal attire.

“Hiro’s birthday party,” he informed me. “Aren’t you going to attend? You should go outside and meet other people.”

I was already feeling a little okay so I decided to attend his birthday party.

I didn’t expect to see Yanna, though! Did they get back together already?!

I remembered how she used to tease me with Sevi. It annoyed me again! Hindi pa rin siya nagbabago at ganoon pa rin ang mapang-asar niyang ngiti. I rolled my eyes and left to look for my brother.

I couldn’t see him so I just went for a drink. When I saw Yanna leaving, I went to the veranda and saw Hiro there on the bench, contemplating. I leaned on the wall beside the bench with a champagne on my hand.

“How are you?” I asked. I was curious if he already met Avi.

“I’m fine,” he nodded. “How are you?”

“My mother died last week,” I informed him.

“I’m sorry, what?” His eyes widened. Looked like he didn’t know, huh. My

brother did not tell him? “I’m sorry.. I.. I didn’t know..”

“Maybe you were away on a flight when it happened. It’s okay,” I gave him a

small smile. “I’m.. leaving soon.”

“Really?” His brows furrowed. “Why?”

“You were right. My dad was an asshole,” I chuckled.

“Did he do something to you?” He raised a brow, ready to hurt somebody.

“Well, he slapped me and hit my knee with a golf club but I’m okay no-”

“He did what?!” He exclaimed.

“I’m okay now. My brother came and punched him in the face his lips bled,” I

chuckled again. It was funny to tell the story in that way.

“As he should,” he shrugged. “Your dad deserved it.”

I nodded and sipped on my champagne. I looked at the sky and sighed heavily.

The night was so peaceful, but I couldn’t stop thinking about him.

Sevi.

“Elyse,” my brother called me. “Let’s go?”

“Yeah, sure,” I nodded. “Bye Hiro. Happy birthday.”

“Hatid ko lang ‘to,” my brother looked at Hiro. “She needs to rest. I’ll come back for the after party.”

That was what he did. I was again, left alone in his unit, nakahiga at nakatitig sa kisame. I wanted to sleep but I couldn’t. Something was bothering me. I finished counting all the sheep, the dogs, the cats, everything, but I still felt so awake.

I looked at the ring on my finger and touched it. My face started to heat. I was already at the verge of crying when Jewel suddenly crawled beside me. I smiled and caressed her head. I had no choice but to leave her with my brother.

“He will take good care of you,” I whispered. “Take care of him, too.”

I closed my eyes again as I dozed off to sleep. For the next few weeks, I just waited for the processing of my papers so I could finally go abroad and work there. I got approved but I did not feel happy.

Because I will be leaving the day after our fifth anniversary. I sighed heavily, staring at the ceiling again.

“I miss him, Ida,” I whispered.

“Oh come on!” Reklamo niya. “You say that everyday! What now?”

“We haven’t really.. broken up yet. I need a closure.”

No, I really just wanted to see him again for the last time before I leave. I just wanted to know if he was doing well so I would be at peace.

“Then go see him,” Ida pushed me to do so. “The question is.. Gusto ka ba niyang makita?”

Ouch. I smiled painfully. He was probably mad at me after I left him in that unit.. at mas lalo pa siyang magagalit dahil aalis ulit ako. I stared at the ceiling again and thought deeply.

Maybe I should really see him before I leave.. or else I would regret it.

“Even if he doesn’t want to see me, Ida.. I will try to see him. Hindi matahimik ang utak ko. I don’t want to bring an emotional baggage to America.

I will go nuts. I want to feel peace. I want to make peace with myself and with him, kahit ayaw niya,” I said desperately.

And I did. I waited until the day of our 5th anniversary. I got out of the bed and sat at the bathtub for more than 30 minutes, thinking deeply. At that moment, I was prepared to receive anything. Sevi’s anger, pain, everything. I

was ready for that.

“I’ll wait at the parking lot,” my brother said before dropping me off.

I smiled at him before leaving the car, holding a damn cake to celebrate our

fifth anniversary for the last time. I wasn’t even sure if Sevi would come to the unit or if he was already there but I was just trying to test my chances. Kapag nandoon siya o dumating siya, then okay. Kapag wala, then I think the universe wanted us to end that way. I will celebrate this day by myself and would just leave an apology letter together with the cake. It was enough. I hoped it was enough.

When I opened the door, I looked around and saw no one. There was no one in the unit. I smiled by myself before placing the cake on the table. I took it out of the box and put five candles around it.

Umupo ako at nagpahalumbaba pagkatapos sindihan ang kandila. I was just staring at it, remembering how we used to celebrate our anniversaries together. It was fun. All of it. I would cherish those moments forever.

I scoffed when I realized that I was already crying. I wiped my tears with my hand and sighed heavily. I closed my eyes to make a wish but before I could blow the candles, I heard the door open.

My eyes widened and I immediately stood up when I saw Sevi entering the unit, holding a blueprint. His lips parted for a moment when he saw me, then his aze

went to the cake in front of me.

“I’m sorry, I thought you.. you were not around,” I said, looking away.

He stared at me for a moment with cold eyes before shaking his head and walking inside the bedroom to place his things. I bit my lower lip when he walked outside again and our eyes met. My eyes were hopeful, the total opposite of his.

“Bakit ka nandito?” He said in a cold voice.

“I have two reasons,” I gave him a small smile. “The first one is to apologize.”

“Hindi ko kailangan,” he shook his head and leaned on the countertop, standing far away from me.

“I’m sorry,” I still apologized. “I’m sorry for everything. I’m sorry for wasting-”

“Sabi ko hindi ko kailangan,” he cut me off.

“Okay,” I nodded as a sign of defeat.

He was cold. He was mad about a lot of things. Maybe it already hit him, huh.

That I was as horrible as my dad, that my dad ruined his family, killed his unborn sibling, harassed her mom, manipulated her and abused her with his

power. Maybe he realized that seeing me won’t stop reminding him of what my

dad did to his family.

And it was the same for me. Seeing him made me feel so ashamed of my dad.

Seeing him just kept on reminding me how I called his mom a liar, like how I

slapped him.. twice.. I slapped him twice.

“Bakit ka umiiyak?” He raised a brow.

I smiled at him and shook my head. “Nothing. I was just thinking of

something.”

“Para saan ‘yan?” He looked at the cake.

“It’s.. It’s nothing. It’s just..” I stopped talking when he started walking

towards me.

He stopped in front of the table and glanced at the cake. When he saw five

candles on it, he scoffed sarcastically and looked away in disbelief. I felt

guilty once more.. and embarrassed. I shouldn’t have done this. I should have

just left.

There was too much damage made, and I couldn’t control it anymore.

“Fifth anniversary,” he whispered in a bitter tone.

“I’m sorry,” I pursed my lips and played with my fingers.

Kahit anong pigil ko sa luha ko, tulo pa rin sila nang tulo. Akala ko wala na

‘kong malalabas, mayroon pa pala. I tried to wipe them away so he wouldn’t see

it. I was afraid it would just make him even more angry.

“Umiiyak ka nanaman,” his jaw moved.

“I’m sorry,” my voice was shaking as I tried to wipe my tears away. “Fuck,

they just won’t stop.”

He pursed his lips and placed a handkerchief on the table before turning his

back against me. Kinuha ko ‘yon at ginamit pamunas ng luha ko habang

nakatalikod siya sa’kin, mabigat ang paghinga. He was trying to calm himself.

“Let it out,” I said while crying. “Let your emotions out. Scream at me. Curse

me. Hurt me-”

“Hindi ko kayang gawin ‘yan!” He faced me in an instant.

“Why not?” I smiled sarcastically.

“Bakit kita sasaktan, ha?!” He looked so mad and disappointed. “Ultimo lamok,

Eli, hindi ko kayang padapuin sa’yo, saktan ka pa?!”

“But you’re mad, right?” My lips were shaking. “Right? You’re mad at me.

Right?!”

“Oo,” he gritted his teeth. “Galit ako. Galit ako sa’yo. Galit ako sa tatay

mo. Galit ako sa sarili ko. Galit ako sa mundo kasi.. tangina..” His voice

broke.

“Kasi ano?” I urged.

“Bakit nangyayari ‘to?” His tears started to fall. “Bakit? Ang saya saya

natin, e, hindi ba? Maayos na ang lahat. Nag-aaway tayo, oo, pero hindi tayo

dadating sa.. ganito.. Tangina, bakit?”

“I’m sorry,” I sobbed.

“At ikaw.. Bakit nandito ka nanaman?” He covered his eyes so I wouldn’t see

his tears but his shoulders started shaking. “Bakit nagpakita ka nanaman?

Pagkatapos mong magmakaawa sa’king paalisin ka, nandito ka nanaman sa harapan

ko? Eli naman, huwag mo naman ako paglaruan, oh..”

“My second reason was because I..” I bit my lower lip and inhaled a large

amount of breath. “I want to say goodbye.”

“Tangina,” Sevi covered his face while crying. “Paalam nanaman.. Paalam

nanaman! Hindi ba ginawa ko na ‘yun? Ano pa bang gusto mo.. Pinapahirapan mo

naman ako, e..”

“You won’t see me after this, Sevi. I’m leaving tomorrow,” I grabbed his

wrists and pulled them gently out of his face so I could see him.

He looked at me with so much pain, anger, love.. longing. His tears started streaming through his cheeks in silence. We could only hear our pain.

“Aalis ka nanaman,” he looked down as he cried. “Umalis ka na, pinaalis na kita, tapos magpapakita ka rito para sabihing.. aalis ka ulit?”

“Tell me you’re breaking up with me,” mariing sabi ko.

“Ayoko..” Sevi closed his eyes and turned his back against me.

“Sevi, please,” I cried.

“Kung gusto mong makipaghiwalay, ikaw ang tumapos nito. Huwag mo ‘kong pilitin kasi hindi ko kaya, Elyse.. Hindi ko kaya,” he cried again.

“Okay, then,” I slowly nodded. “Sebastian Vincent, I’m.. breaking up with you. You can hate me all you want. Do what you can to cope with your pain. I am a horrible person who doubted you and your mom. I sided with my father. I slapped you twice. I left you once.. and I will leave you again. I have done too much damage, Sevi. You will find a better woman.”

Sevi did not talk. His back was facing me as he cried and cried and cried. I covered my mouth so he wouldn’t hear my desperate sobs. I slowly walked towards him and wrapped my arms around his waist to give him a hug.

“Elyse,” he cried as he held both of my hands with his. “Kung aalis ka..

Umalis ka na lang, parang awa mo na.. Huwag nang ganito. Huwag mo na ‘kong

pinapaniwalang mahal mo pa ‘ko.. Tangina, nagmamakaawa na ‘ko sa’yo..”

“I do love you,” I cried. “I love you.. but we just can’t be together.”

“Huwag ka nang magsalita, please,” his voice broke.

Sinandal ko ang ulo ko sa likuran niya at hinigpitan ang yakap ko. Ang tanging

naririnig ko lang ay ‘yung iyak naming dalawa. I was holding onto him like I

couldn’t let him go, but I already did. I already lost him when I begged for

him to let me leave. I already lost him when I called his mother a liar. I

already lost him but he was trying to hold on to our memories together,

because they were his comfort.

“Kung aalis ka, putangina, umalis ka na,” tinanggal niya ang yakap ko sa

kanya.

“I will,” I let him go. “But can I ask you for one last favor?”

“Ano nanaman ba ‘yun, Elyse?” He faced me, wiping his tears with the back of

his hand.

“Let’s greet each other,” I pointed at the cake.

Sevi sighed heavily before sitting on the other side of the table, staring at

the cake in front of us. Sinindihan ko ulit ‘yun at umupo sa tapat niya. I

looked at him with so much pain and regret and his eyes mirrored mine.

“Happy 5th anniversary,” I gave him a small smile.

“Happy 5th..” His voice broke and his lips started to shake. He covered his face as he tried to stop himself from crying. He inhaled a large amount of breath before taking his hands off and looking at me again. “..anniversary. Happy 5th anniversary.. my love.”

My tears fell when he called me his love for the last time. I still gave him a small smile, ignoring the tears on my face.

“Let’s make a wish,” I encouraged him.

He closed his eyes and I closed mine.

I wished that his pain would stop. If only I could transfer everything to me, I would gladly endure even thrice of what he was feeling right now.

“Ready?” I opened my eyes and saw him staring at me.

He nodded. We both leaned over the table to blow the candles and then went

back to our seat, crying our hearts out.

He stood up when he couldn’t take it anymore. He looked away and clenched his

fist.

“Umalis ka na, Elyse,” he stated in a cold voice.

I nodded and slowly stood up.

“You won’t ask where I’m going?” I sounded hopeful.

“Hindi,” he shook his head.

“Why?” I bit my lower lip.

“Baka hanapin kita,” he swallowed hard.

“Okay,” tumango ako at kinuha na ang bag kong nakapatong sa table.

“Ayaw kitang hanapin, Elyse. Ayaw na kitang makita,” mariing sabi niya.

“Okay,” I repeated, giving him a small smile. “Goodbye, Sevi.”

As soon as I turned my back against him, I started crying silently. I slowly walked towards the door, not wanting to leave and not wanting to stay either.

I just wanted to stand there without doing anything.

I held the doorknob and twisted it, closing my eyes as I sighed heavily.

“Sevi,” I stopped walking.

He did not talk but I knew he was looking at me, waiting for me to say something.

“This isn’t over yet,” I whispered.

“Ano?” He sounded confused.

I will ruin him for you.

“Nothing,” I sighed. “Goodbye.”

“Huwag ka nang babalik. Huwag ka nang magpapakita sa’kin. Parang awa mo na,”

he reminded me.

I covered my mouth to stifle a sob as I nodded. I inhaled before pulling the door and stepping outside. I managed to walk until I was already inside the elevator, silently breaking down.

“How did it go?” My brother asked when I opened the door of his car.

“It went..” I didn’t know what to say. “..fine.”

He will heal fast and I will be the one stuck but it was fine, as long as he wasn’t hurting anymore. Maybe someday, I can redeem myself in front of him.

Someday.

“Alfred is looking for you everywhere,” he informed me. “He lost the heiress of his company. He was going crazy.”

“You got your shares, don’t you?” I looked at my brother.

“Yes,” he whispered.

“Make him step down from his position,” I gritted my teeth. “And I will take over the company.”

Someday…

.

“The table is now open for questions.”

I picked up my ballpen and my small notebook where I wrote down my questions

for the project. I already scanned the whole plan but since I wasn’t informed

about what happened with their first meeting, I had a lot of questions on my

mind.

“So the location is in Batangas, right?” I asked, looking at the folder.

“Yes, Ma’am,” the presenter answered.

“How long would the construction take? In estimation?”

“3 years, hopefully,” I looked at Engineer Camero when he answered. “It was

already discussed last meeting.”

His voice was cold. He did not even look at me when he answered. He was just

reading something on his folder, totally ignoring my presence. The side of my

lips rose when I heard his sarcastic reply.

“My apologies, then, Engineer Camero. You might have not noticed that I was

not around last meeting,” I almost scoffed.

“He was also not around last meeting, Madam,” Alice whispered.

“Oh,” I chuckled. This man! Kung makapagsalita akala mo naman ay nasa meeting!

“I would like to inform everyone that Miss Ledezma just got appointed as the

C.E.O after we discussed the collaboration, and she was also out of the office

for two weeks to meet with business partners in Europe, America, and other

parts of Asia,” my secretary informed.

Austin was probably the one who attended the meeting for me, or maybe they

held the meeting before I got appointed. I wasn’t sure about that. They did

inform me about a new project but they did not tell me that Valeria Group

Construction was in-charge of it.

Or maybe I forgot about it completely? Ah, fuck, I still have jetlag. My brain

won’t function!

3 years na ba?

Going 4. I can’t say that I stayed in the U.S. for three whole years. I

travelled a lot with the money I got after I became the major shareholder of

the company. I smirked.

I played a lot and explored a lot with my newly-found freedom until I realized

that I wanted to do more. I wanted to keep myself busy but I never knew that

this job would really stress me out. I was still on my adjusting phase. I

hoped that it will get better.

Travelling and working were my ways to cope. I did everything to forget my

guilt, pain, love, regret, everything. Along with the process, it seemed like

I forgot who I was before and just changed until I couldn’t even recognize

myself anymore. I had to create a mask of my own in order to face the people

in the company, scared that they might also become monsters like my dad. He

ruined me so bad.

“Alice, kindly compile everything about this project including the calendar,

budget, final design, past presentations, and other documents needed, then

send it to my e-mail,” I told her. “If you have a hard copy, you can bring it

to my office.”

“Yes, Madam,” she nodded.

“When will the groundbreaking start, Engineer Camero?” I raised a brow.

“As soon as we get your approval, Miss Ledezma,” he looked at me now with no

emotion in his eyes.

“I will inform your company,” I nodded. “Meeting adjourned.”

Everyone stood up and started fixing their things. Tumayo na rin ako at kinuha

ang gamit ko bago naglakad paalis. I was like walking on a runway. Everyone

would stop walking to give way to me.

“Alice,” I stopped walking when I remembered something.

“Madam?” She asked nervously.

“Do you like my hair?” I curiously asked her. “Does it look weird?”

I pointed at my ash grey hair in soft curls, ending just above my waist. I

dyed my hair a month ago and good thing the color wasn’t that bright. Bagay

naman sa’kin. May pagka ombrÃ© siya.

“Hindi po weird, Madam! Bagay po sa inyo,” she gave me a large smile. “You

look like an international model!”

“Thanks,” I smiled cutely before walking again.

I spent the whole day reading about the new project in Batangas. It’s a large

beach resort so it would take years to finish. The architect in charge was our

employee, si Architect Rosario. I actually liked the design. Austin probably

approved this one.

“Elyse,” Austin went inside my office. Speaking of. “Dinner?”

“Okay,” I nodded and stood up to get my things.

We grew closer together only because his dad was the new Chairman of the board

and I had to get along with them. Austin would also inform me about the

company while I was away so he really helped me a lot.

“I didn’t know they would put Engineer Camero in charge,” Austin explained

while we were eating.

“It’s fine,” I chuckled. “It’s not a big deal anymore.”

At least makikita ko siya, duh!

‘Huwag ka nang babalik. Huwag ka nang magpapakita sa’kin. Parang awa mo na.’

The smile on my face faded when I remembered his last words to me. I stared at

the glass of water for a moment as I felt a slight pain on my chest. In my

head, I was already apologizing to him for showing up again.

It wasn’t my fault! It wasn’t my plan but I must admit that it made me

excited. I wanted to impress him. I wanted to show him that I was doing fine.

I wasn’t the same anymore. I have changed.

But his attitude towards me didn’t change at all. I smiled bitterly. I just

wanted us to be okay or to act civil towards each other.

“Hey, are you listening to me?” Austin caught my attention.

“Oh, sorry, I was thinking of something else,” I laughed it off.

“I said, masyadong maangas ang dating ni Engineer Camero. I don’t like him,”

he shrugged. “Just because he’s one of the most successful engineers in the

industry doesn’t mean that he’s also allowed to talk back to you like what

happened earlier.”

“Come on, it’s fine,” I smiled. “He was not talking back. He was just

answering my question.”

“Don’t defend him. If it was another person, you would probably rant about

it,” Austin raised his brows. “Am I right, Miss Ledezma? Him, being your ex,

has an advantage?”

I did not answer. I just smirked at him and sipped on my water. After our

dinner, kinuha ko na ang gamit ko at hinatid na niya ‘ko sa labas. I went

inside my white Lexus and put my bag on my side. Nilabas ko ang phone ko para

i-open ang Waze. I was still bad with directions.

I went home to our mansion. Since wala si Daddy, wala na si Mommy, and ayaw

din tumira rito ni Kuya, ako na lang. It was renovated a little, and I changed

some colors so it would look modern. My room also became bigger and I used

another room as my walk-in closet, bigger than the last time. It was connected

to my room with a sliding door.

We only have two guards and two helpers to maintain the cleanliness and

security of the house. The two helpers would only go here to clean the house

and do the laundry and then they will go home na, unless I still need

anything. Kuya Roel was still our butler. He was in-charge of everything.

I took my YSL heels off and walked upstairs to put it inside my walk-in

closet. I also cleaned my bag before I placed it on the shelf. Wala nang guilt

kapag gumagastos ako ngayon dahil alam kong pera ko ‘yon. I was working for

it. Sometimes, I would just make dumb excuses for myself and say ‘I deserve

this’.

I took a shower and went to bed wearing my pajamas. I just stared at the

ceiling in silence, realizing how lonely it was to live in a large mansion

alone. Wala nang thrill sa buhay ko. It was the usual routine every day. Wake

up, go to work, get stressed out, go home, and then repeat.

I looked at my knot ring and remembered him again. I couldn’t take this off

ever since I started wearing it. When I tried to remove it, I just felt naked.

I felt like something was missing. Hindi ko siya kayang alisin sa’kin.

“I already lost you years ago but why the hell are you still on my mind?” I

whispered.

The next day, I asked for a meeting regarding the project. I wanted to make

minor changes on the design. This time, I was ready to see him. I was wearing

a pair of black slacks, brown heels, light brown sleeveless turtle neck, black

coat, and Chanel belt. I tied my hair in a high ponytail and put on my shades

before going out of the car and giving the key to the valet. I was also

wearing a minimal amount of makeup.

Every employee would stop walking to greet me as I walked my way towards the

elevator, holding my cup of coffee. I did not smile. I just looked forward and

ignored my surroundings because I felt.. nervous.

“Alice!” I called as soon as I went inside my office.

“Madam!” Natatarantang pumasok sa office ko si Alice at inayos ang salamin

niya. “Good morning, Madam! Looking good!”

“Schedule for today,” I took my shades off and sat on my swivel chair.

I nodded as she went through my packed schedule for today. Someone would

interview me for a magazine around lunchtime so wala na rin akong time mag-

lunch. After that, meeting na with VGC, and after that meeting, another

meeting with the executives.

“Thank you,” I dismissed her.

I read some files on my desk before the interviewer went inside my office

together with her team. I retouched my makeup while they were getting ready.

They asked a lot of things about my success. I mentioned my school, my course,

my jobs.

“Did you have time to play around or fall in love during your college days or

were you only focused on becoming the heiress of the company?” She suddenly

asked.

“Oh,” I couldn’t answer properly. “I actually had a boyfriend.”

“Are you still together?” She asked, smiling.

“No,” I looked away. “Next question.”

Good thing she got the hint and completely steered away from the topic. I

wasn’t comfortable with that. Baka kung ano pa ang mahukay nila kapag nalaman

nila ang tungkol doon. It was better to stay lowkey about it.

“Miss Ledezma, meeting in 10 minutes,” Alice reminded me.

“We’re wrapping up,” I told her.

Mabuti na lang at natapos na rin kaagad ang interview kaya tumayo na ‘ko at

kinuha ang bag ko. Saktong 2 PM, umalis ako ng office at umakyat sa board

room. Everyone stood up again to welcome my presence.

Engineer Camero was already there, talking with another engineer guy. He was

wearing a black dress shirt with three buttons opened, and sleeves folded

above his elbows. He looked more professional and mature with his hair pushed

back a bit. He was holding a ballpen and a folder was in front of him.

Architect Rosario stood up to present the final design again.

“There, there,” I pointed at the screen. “Is it possible to expand this area

and make it a spa? Also, there shouldn’t be any tents right here so we can

hold beach parties at night in this area. It should be located far away from

the people so they wouldn’t be bothered by the noise. It’s already the best

spot for parties. What do you think?”

“I will take note of that, Miss Ledezma. What do you think, Engineer?” She

asked.

“It makes sense,” seryosong sabi ni Engineer Camero, nakatingin sa screen.

“Let’s go with that.”

I nodded. We discussed more about the changes in the project before I finally

approved. They will start the construction in two weeks. They were just

waiting for me. In the middle of our meeting, Alice distributed snacks. Ang sa

akin lang ang naiiba. Naglapag siya ng fruit cup and pasta na nasa container

for my lunch.

“Madam, lunch mo po,” she reminded me.

“No, I’m good. I’m full,” I gave her a small smile. “Let’s have a break,

everyone. Eat your snacks.”

Umingay sa board room nang casually nang nag-usap ang mga tao. Pinagpaplanuhan

nila ang groundbreaking ceremony. Some stood up to go to the other side of the

table and some were still talking about the project in a less formal way. I

remained on my seat, signing some papers.

I stood up to get water on the other side of the room. I stopped when I saw

Sevi getting water, too, and filling up his container. When he glanced at me,

he stopped and gestured me to go first.

“Thanks,” I said awkwardly.

He was standing so close to me I could smell his expensive perfume. I bit my

lower lip as I filled my disposable cup with water.

“Madam, hindi ka po kakain ng lunch? Liligpitin ko na po ba?” Alice went to

me.

I glanced at Sevi who was already looking at Alice with his brows furrowed a

bit.

“Yes, pakiligpit na lang,” I told her, still getting water. “Anyway, Alice can

you ask the head of-”

“Shit!” Sevi suddenly held my hand and pulled it away.

My eyes widened when I noticed that my cup was already full! Natapon na ang

tubig sa sahig at nabasa pa ang sapatos niya. May mga napatingin na empleyado

pero ‘yung iba, abala pa rin sa pinag-uusapan.

“Madam! Papalinis ko na rin po ‘yan!” Nagmamadaling umalis si Alice.

“Sorry!” I looked at Sevi who was already looking down on his wet shoes. I

panicked and tried to get a box of tissue but my heels suddenly slipped

through the water. “Fuck!”

“Ampucha,” Sevi whispered, his arms around my waist.

“I’m so sorry!” Tumayo kaagad ako at lumayo sa kanya, nagkakalat na ng tubig

sa sahig dahil sa heels ko at sa hawak kong baso. Natatapon na ‘yung tubig.

“Oh shit, the floor’s already wet.”

“Hindi ba obvious,” Sevi whispered, looking away.

Mabuti na lang dumating kaagad si Alice kasama ang janitor. My gosh, I was

embarrassing myself in front of the people! Good thing kaunti lang ang

nagkaroon ng pakialam sa nangyayari sa likod! I composed myself again and went

back to my seat.

Hindi na tuloy ako naka-focus sa meeting! Basta noong natapos, pumunta na ‘ko

sa susunod na meeting, sa mas malaking board room. The agenda wasn’t that

important. We just discussed some things and I went back to my office na.

“My gosh! My gosh!” Pinaypayan ko ang sarili ko, walking back and forth.

That was so embarrassing! Nakakainis naman! How could I mess up like that?!

Damn, Eli! Pagkuha na lang ng tubig, palpak pa! Sevi’s presence was really

distracting. It was his fault!

“Alice!” Sigaw ko ulit.

“Madam!” She ran inside my office. “Do you need anything?”

“My perfume from France,” I reminded her. “I already talked to the owner. Wala

pa bang stock? Can you check the site again?”

“I already checked it, Madam! On the way na po ang delivery,” she gave me a

smile.

“Okay, good,” I calmed myself down. “I changed my mind about the limited-

edition bag. It wasn’t that pretty anyway.”

“Okay po, Madam,” she nodded. “Anything else?”

“Clear my schedule on the day of the groundbreaking ceremony,” sambit ko

habang pinapaypayan pa rin ang sarili gamit ang kamay. “I would probably feel

tired on that day. Sobrang init. Also, start sending our invitations for our

groundbreaking ceremony.”

“Okay, Madam.”

I took my coat off and sat on my swivel chair, swaying from side to side while

staring in front. I was thinking of what to wear on that day. Maybe I should

just wear something casual? Sleeveless dahil mainit? Then shades?

That was really what I came up with on the day of the ceremony. I was wearing

a sleeveless white silk top, black pants, Gucci belt, and white sandals. I

tied my hair in a bun and wore my shades. I convinced myself that I could

drive to Batangas by myself since I have Waze naman, but damn, I still had a

hard time finding the damn beach!

“Is this it?” I asked myself when I saw some cars.

I parked beside a silver Porsche Macan and went out, calling Alice. Mabuti na

lang at tama ako! Sinundo niya ‘ko at sinamahan sa venue ng event. They placed

a large white tent sa sand and some balloons. I greeted and talked to some

businessmen while waiting for others.

“I heard what happened to your dad. Good thing the company didn’t go down with

him, huh?” The old man said, laughing.

“Yeah, they managed to pull it up,” I smiled. “My dad actually deserved it,

Salvador.”

“I see. You also hate your father,” he shook his head. “Are you married?”

“No,” I scoffed.

“You don’t have a boyfriend right now?” He smiled at me.

“No, I’m too busy to have a boyfriend,” I glanced at Sevi when I saw him

walking with Engineer Lavin. I got distracted for a bit. He was wearing a

white short-sleeved polo and a pair of maong pants. May dala siyang hard hat

at blueprint, pointing on an area.

“Would you like to have some dinner tonight?” Salvador smirked.

Napabalik ang tingin ko sa kanya. I felt disgusted when I realized what he said.

“What? No,” I rolled my eyes. “Would you excuse me, please.”

I excused myself out of the conversation and started walking away from the tent. I went to Alice to ask about the catering and then I greeted more guests. Marami pang oras bago magsimula kaya naglakad muna ako papunta sa dagat at huminto sa buhanginan. I stared at the waves while memorizing my speech.

The wind was calm, tinatangay ang buhok ko. Nakakakalma rin ang tunog ng alon.

When I looked at my left side, nakita ko si Sevi na naglalakad din sa tabing-dagat, dala-dala pa rin ang hard hat. He was also talking to himself, probably memorizing his speech like me. I smiled as I watched him. His brows were furrowed a bit, medyo nasisilaw sa araw. Hinahangin din ang buhok niya pati ang polo niya. He looked so unreal.

I sighed and looked away when Engineer Ramos called him. It was Bianca. I

didn’t know she would be here. Tumalikod na ‘ko at naglakad na lang pabalik sa

tent. I checked everything again before going back to my seat in front.

I was quiet the whole ceremony. I went up to the stage to deliver my speech,

thanking a lot of people for making the project happen, and some boring stuff.

When it was Sevi’s turn, I was just looking at my nail polish with my legs

crossed.

“And we would also like to thank.. Uh.. Miss Amora Elyse Ledezma,” I looked at

him in an instant when I heard my name.

He glanced at me for a second before looking away to continue his speech.

Hindi ko na naintindihan ang iba pa niyang sinasabi. His deep voice was

playing inside my head over and over. I think I was starting to go crazy.

Everyone clapped so I unconsciously clapped, too. He smiled at everyone before

going down the stage. After the ceremony, I took pictures with our partners.

Alice handed me a hard hat for props and also a shovel.

I also took pictures with the engineers. I pursed my lips, not knowing where

to position myself. Ang sabi nila sa center daw ako pero si Sevi nasa center

din so hindi ko alam saan ako pupunta!

“Miss Ledezma, pwesto na po,” the photographer said. “Sa tabi ni Engineer.”

I swallowed hard before nodding. Naglakad ako palapit kay Sevi at tumabi sa

kanya, dala-dala ang bwisit na shovel. I looked dumb and small beside him. He

looked so professional, bagay na bagay ang hard hat habang ako, mukhang trying

hard.

“Baliktad,” he whispered.

Kumunot ang noo ko at lumingon sa kanya. Was he talking to me?

“Pardon?” I blinked.

He sighed and almost rolled his eyes before getting the shovel I was holding.

Inikot niya bago binalik sa’kin. I looked down on it and realized that I

wasn’t holding it upside down. Nang tumingin ako sa baba, nahulog ang maluwag

kong hard hat.

Sevi shook his head before picking up the hat and handing it to me again. I

bit my lower lip before getting it from him. Other engineers were already

looking at us dahil ang tagal namin umayos. Engineer Lavin was laughing on the

side.

“Ang tagal naman, nanginginig na labi ko kakangiti,” reklamo ni Engineer Lavin

while laughing. .

“Miss Ledezma, Engineer Camero ayos na po,” the photographer said.

“Sorry,” I gave him a small smile.

I stood there, holding the shovel like a dumb person. It was so awkward. I was

so stiff. Tinignan ako ng photographer kaya inayos ko ang posture ko. I

probably looked stupid.

“Masyadong malayo kayong dalawa.. po,” the photographer looked irritated now

when he pointed at us.

“Sorry,” Engineer Camero said before stepping closer to me.

I smiled at the camera, ignoring Sevi’s scent near me. Nang matapos, saka lang

ako nakahinga nang maluwag. Tumalikod kaagad ako at naglakad paalis. Tinanggal

ko ang hard hat ko at binalik ang shovel. It was so hot.

“Hello, Tito,” I greeted Anthony Guerrero, Austin’s dad.

“Hello, Elyse,” he looked stern and strict. “Have you visited your father?”

“Not yet,” I faked a smile.

“He’s on hospital arrest, right?” He smiled. “I visited him last week. He’s

not getting any better.”

“I haven’t seen him in a while,” I pursed my lips. “And I am not planning to.”

It was my plan all along to take the company away from him, the same company

that he created, the same company that he worked hard for. I planned to take

it away from him and ruin him completely. He just made it easier by

transferring his shares to me.Â He still trusted me, huh? Or was that his way

of apologizing for what he did?

Well, he already lost me. Years ago. And he put our company at stake for what

he did. Who would forgive him?

I excused myself and went to the long table to get a plate. Kumakain na ‘yung

lahat kaya pumila na rin ako. Kaunti lang ang kinuha ko dahil sa diet ko. I

picked the healthiest. A mixture of vegetables.

I sat with some businessmen and women. I had to get everyone to like me and it

wasn’t even that hard. I have known these people ever since I was a child.

Tuwing may gathering, ako ang hinaharap ni Daddy.

“You are so different from your dad, Elyse,” the old woman said, smiling.

I fucking hope so.

“Oh, isn’t that right?” I smiled at her. “I got it from my mom.”

After eating, unti-unti nang nawawala ang mga tao. I stayed until the sky went

dark para masigurado kong maayos na maliligpit ang mga ginamit. I thanked the

people I hired for the event like the light and sound, catering, event

organizers. The engineers and architects were still discussing something.

“Take care, Alice,” I said when I saw her leaving.

“Thank you, Madam! Ingat kayo, Madam!” She was so energetic.

Kinuha ko ang gamit ko at naglakad na papunta sa parking. I opened the door of

my car and went inside. Nilagay ko kaagad ang phone ko sa harapan ko at inopen

si Waze. I put my seatbelt on and drove away.

It was so dark. May ginagawa pang daan sa gilid kaya medyo bumagal ako. I

looked around, getting confused where to turn left. Hindi familiar ang daan

galing sa beach!

“Turn left,” Waze said.

“Turn left where?!” I exclaimed.

My lips parted when the screen suddenly went black. I stopped the car at the

side of the road and tried to open my phone again.

“Fuck,” I whispered.

Lowbat! Agad akong naghalungkat sa bag ko pero wala akong dalang powerbank.

Wala rin ang cord ko! Naiwan ko sa office!

“God,” I closed my eyes and massaged my head. “Okay, Elyse. You can do this.

Get a grip.”

I looked around and noticed that there were no cars passing by. Naghintay pa

‘ko pero wala talaga kaya kinalma ko na lang ang sarili ko at dire-diretsong

nag-drive. I turned left on the road because that was what Waze said before

siya namatay.

“Where the fuck am I?” I started to get scared. Wala akong nakikitang tao!

Umatras ulit ako at umiba ng daan. I was trying so hard to remember how I got

to the beach. Sinubukan kong bumalik, hinuhulaan ang daan.

“Oh my god, Mommy,” I started tearing up.

I just stopped my car again on the side. Inuntog ko ang sarili ko sa manibela,

naiinis. I started crying while hitting the steering wheel with my hand. It

was so frustrating. Bumaba tuloy ako ng sasakyan at naghintay na lang ng

dadaan.

I started kicking small tones beside my car.

“What the hell!” I shouted when I heard a beep.

Napalingon kaagad ako sa sasakyang huminto sa harapan ko. It was the Porsche

one. My lips parted when I saw Sevi through the window. He was holding the

steering wheel with his one hand.

“Anong ginagawa mo dyan?” He raised a brow.

“I got lost!” Amin ko kaagad. “My.. My phone died. And I’m.. I’m so bad with-”

“Directions,” he sighed and looked away.

“Yes,” I bit my lower lip and played with my hands, embarrassed. “Are you on

your way to Manila?”

“Saan ba ‘ko nakatira?” He raised a brow.

“H-how would I know that?!” I panicked. “I did not stalk you, excuse me! I did

not.. hire someone din to search for your location! It’s not like I am.. I am

still curious about you, ‘no! You’re not-”

“Tapos ka na ba?” He looked bored. “Alis na ‘ko.”

When his car started to move, I panicked and ran in front to stop him.

“Wait, wait!” I put my hands in front to stop his car.

Napahinto kaagad siya at bumaba ng sasakyan. Padabog niyang sinara ang pinto

at mukhang galit na naglakad palapit sa’kin.

“What the fuck?!” He exclaimed in disbelief. “Muntik na kitang masagasaan! Ano

bang iniisip mo?!”

“C-can you help me?!” I sounded so desperate.

“Hindi naman talaga ako aalis, tangina,” he still looked mad. “Nabunggo ba

kita?”

“What?” I blinked. “No.. I’m fine.”

He sighed heavily and massages his head in frustration. He put his tongue on

the inside of his cheek before nodding.

“Pumasok ka na sa sasakyan mo,” he sighed. “Sumunod ka sa’kin. Dalian mo.”

:)

26

“Why is he driving so fast?!”

I sped up and tried to catch him. My eyes widened when I hear a loud beep from

a car from behind after my overtake. I could almost hear the driver cursing

me. Muntik na ‘kong mabangga!

“I’m sorry!” I shouted, kahit alam kong hindi naman niya maririnig.

I noticed that Sevi slowed down so I was able to catch up. Nasa likuran na ‘ko

ng sasakyan niya. Masyado naman siyang mabagal ngayon! Binusinahan ko tuloy

kaya binilisan niya nanaman.

I feel like he was playing with me! Well, excuse me, Engineer Camero, hindi

tayo naglalaro ng mga sasakyang freebie sa gasoline station! Pwede tayong

maaksidente rito sa ginagawa mo! My gosh!

“Oh fuck, naiihi ako,” I inhaled a large amount of breath to calm myself down.

Binilisan ko ang takbo ng sasakyan ko para maabutan ko siya. I positioned my

car next to his with my window open so he could hear me. His brows furrowed

when he opened his window too and slowed his car down.

“I want to pee!” I yelled, not taking my eyes off the road.

He closed his window so I wasn’t sure if he heard me or not. I just rolled my

eyes and followed him again when he sped up. May nilikuan siyang gasoline

station kaya lumiko rin ako. I parked behind his car and went down to run

towards the restroom.

Pagkatapos, I put alcohol on my hands and went back to the parking. Sevi was

already outside, leaning on his car, waiting for me. His brow shot up when he

saw me walking back.

“Iniwan mong bukas kotse mo,” he looked at me like he was judging me.

“Oh, right,” I chuckled. “Sorry. I didn’t want to pee on my pants.”

“Ang bilis mo magpatakbo, muntik ka nang mabunggo kanina,” he scolded me.

Wow, ha! Ako pa! I was trying to catch up! He was the one driving so fast!

“No, hinahabol kita,” I crossed my arms.

“Ano?” He raised a brow.

My eyes widened when I realized that it sounded so wrong given our history. I

panicked and put my hands in front of me to deny what he was thinking.

“I mean, I was trying to catch up! Nawawala ako because you were driving so

fast like you were in some kind of a racing movie or something. Y-you probably

think that you’re Lightning McQueen or-”

“Lightning McQueen,” he repeated like it was funny.

“Yeah, you know that movie? The one who says kachow?” I asked curiously,

sinisigurado lang na gets niya ang reference.

“The one who says what?” He crossed his arms over his chest and shot a brow

up.

“K-kachow?” I blinked twice.

He bit his lower lip and nodded playfully before opening the door of his car

again without saying anything. I pouted and was about to go inside my Lexus

when I suddenly remembered something.

“Hey,” I called him and he looked at me. “Do you have a powerbank?”

He stared at me for a moment before getting something inside his car. He

handed me a black powerbank with a built-in Apple cord. I gave him a genuine

smile as a sign of gratitude.

“Thank you,” I said before getting inside my car.

Sinundan ko ulit siya paalis at pabalik ng Manila. He was slowing down kapag

nawawala ako sa likuran ng sasakyan niya. I think that was an improvement.

Nabuhay na rin ulit ang phone ko so I put Waze back. Waze said we were already

near Manila.

Sevi stopped his car on the side so I stopped, too. Hindi ko alam kung bababa

ako o ano kaya naghintay na lang ako sa loob hanggang sa maka-receive ng

notification.

sevirous: Manila na.

I bit my lower lip and typed my reply.

elydezma: Yup, thanks. I can use Waze now. You can go.

Sineen niya lang ako at nakita kong nag-drive na siya paalis, leaving his

powerbank with me. I shrugged and just followed Waze on my way home. Kuya Roel

was waiting outside the mansion, talking to another security guard.

“Kuya Roel,” I sounded like I was crying.

“Anong nangyari, Ma’am?” He looked surprised to see my facial expression.

“I got lost,” I pouted. “In Batangas! Can you believe that?! I got lost in

Batangas! Not in Manila, but in Batangas! My phone died and I had no powerbank

or even a cord! Starting today, I will put two powerbanks in my car and two

cords!”

“Paano kayo nakauwi, Ma’am?” Nagtatakang tanong niya.

“Why, Kuya Roel? Ayaw mo ba ‘kong makauwi?” Pinangsingkitan ko siya ng mga

mata.

“Hindi naman po sa ganoon, Ma’am!” He laughed at me.

“Someone I know helped me,” I looked away, refusing to say the name. “Anyway,

have a good night.”

I went straight to my room to take a shower and do my night care routine. I

went to my bed wearing my nighties. Kinuha ko kaagad ang powerbank ko sa

drawer at nilagay na sa bag, including my extra cord so I would never get lost

again. I was so scared.

I charged Sevi’s powerbank so I could bring it back to him tomorrow. Surely,

nasa site siya since start na ng construction nila. If wala, then fine. Kapag

nakita ko na lang siya ulit.

The next morning, I woke up early to go for my morning jog around the village.

Pagbalik ko, nag-shower na ulit ako at nagbihis. I was wearing a black tank

top and a khaki-colored two-piece suit with checkered design. I partnered it

with brown heels and black handbag. I tied my hair in a half-ponytail and wore

my Chanel shades.

Dumaan muna ako sa coffee shop to buy a green tea before going to work. This

time, I gave a small smile to the employees who would stop walking to greet

me. Maganda ang gising ko today dahil nakapag-exercise.

“Alice, to my office,” sabi ko pagkadaan ko sa desk niya.

I took my shades off and sat on my swivel chair to listen to my schedule for

today. I opened my laptop to check the files sent to me yesterday. So far,

maluwag naman ang schedule ngayon dahil walang meeting. Puro paperwork na

lang.

“Elyse,” Austin went inside my office without notice.

“What?” I continued typing on my laptop. “Next time, you should knock first

before entering. Basic manners, Austin.”

“Sorry,” he chuckled. “Do you want to have lunch together?”

“No, I’m busy,” I glanced at him for a second.

“Hindi ka na kumakain, ah,” he shook his head. “Maybe I shouldn’t have

convinced my dad to appoint you as the C.E.O?”

“I can do it without your dad, Austin,” I almost rolled my eyes. “I am the

major shareholder of this company, in case you forgot. I own over half of it.”

“I know, Elyse. I was just saying that.. you should not forget to eat,” he

explained. “Huwag masyadong magpaka-busy. Money can wait. Health comes first.”

“You’re aware that good health comes from having money, right? It’s giving

people access to quality health care. We are too consumed by capitalism that

even basic needs are considered an opportunity to earn profit from,” I

chuckled at his face while typing on my laptop. “Makes you think, huh?”

“You’re literally a C.E.O of a large company,” he scoffed.

“I provide help where help is needed,” I rolled my eyes. “Anyway, just go. I’m

busy.”

He shook his head in disappointment before leaving my office. I went back to

my work until I decided to take a break. Kinuha ko ang bag ko at naglakad

paalis para pumunta sa site. Ibabalik ko na ang powerbank.

“Okay, Batangas, I got you,” I whispered to myself before starting the engine.

I won’t get lost anymore! Tinandaan ko na ‘yung daan hangga’t maliwanag pa. I

focused on the road but I still got confused. Bahala na nga! I had Waze! Good

thing I arrived safely. I parked beside Sevi’s car again. Yey, nandito siya.

Hindi sayang ang effort ko mag-drive. Next time, I should ask first.

I walked around and followed the noise. I saw construction workers eating

their food. Lunch time na pala. I looked around and saw a group of engineers

outside. May portable table doon at nakalapag ang blueprint. They were talking

about something casually. Some were laughing.

Lumapit ako para hanapin si Engineer Camero pero napahinto rin ako nang

makitang kakalabas niya lang ng office with Bianca. He was wearing a white

button-down polo shirt na short-sleeved partnered with a pair of maong pants.

He was holding the strap of his hard hat with his hand, and may suot na I.D.

“Miss Ledezma!” Architect Rosario suddenly called me.

My lips parted and and acted like I was surprised to see her. I smiled

awkwardly before walking towards them in my heels. Medyo nahirapan tuloy ako!

Mabuhangin! Sevi raised a brow and watched me suffer.

“Hi, I just came here to check on the construction. Do you guys need

anything?” I asked, smiling.

“We’re good, Miss Ledezma. Lunch time,” Architect Rosario smiled at me. “Nag-

lunch ka na po ba?”

“Uh, not yet,” I smiled at her. “Enjoy your lunch. If you need anything, you

have my number. Thank you for your hard work!”

“Wala po akong number niyo, Miss Ledezma,” Engineer Lavin suddenly said,

laughing a little.

“Oh, is that right?” Kinuha ko ang wallet ko para bigyan siya ng business card

ko. “There. You can also e-mail me but if it’s an emergency, you can text na

lang or call. Magpakilala ka muna, though.”

“Engineer Theo Lavin, Miss Ledezma,” he offered his hand and smiled at me. “We

already met each other.”

“What?” Naguluhan ako pero hinawakan ko pa rin ang kamay niya.

“Taga-UST ako, Ma’am,” he laughed again and looked back at Sevi who had his

arms crossed over his chest, watching us. “Blockmate ko si Master Sevi.”

“Oh,” my mouth formed an ‘o’. Damn! So he knew about us!

“Share mo lang ‘yan?” Supladong pambabara ni Sevi sa kanya.

“Pati nga pala si Engineer Castillo,” he pointed at the other guy wearing a

hard hat while eating. “Tatlo kami sa team na ano.. Taga-USTe, Miss Ledezma.”

“That’s nice. You guys are so successful now,” I smiled at him.

“Bakit ka nandito?” Sevi asked suddenly.

“Oh, I-” I stopped talking when he suddenly went inside the office again. What

the hell! Ang bastos kausap?! “He’s so grumpy!” Reklamo ko kay Engineer Lavin.

“Sumunod ka raw sa loob, Ma’am. ‘Yun lang meaning noon,” he laughed again.

“Just call me Elyse,” I said before going inside the office.

He was leaning on an office table, reading a folder but he stopped when he saw

me inside. May mga tables and chairs sa loob at nakalagay ang ibang pagkain

doon, mga gamit nila, and computers. Naka-aircon pa. Buti naman. It must be

nice working beside a beach, huh? Nakakainggit.

It wasn’t the only office. Marami pa dahil marami silang nagtatrabaho rito.

Maybe this was for him and his team?

“Bakit ka nga nandito?” He asked again, holding onto the edge of the table,

his veins were showing.

“Oh,” kinuha ko ang powerbank sa loob ng bag ko at inabot sa kanya. “Here.

Thank you.”

“Nag-drive ka papuntang Batangas para.. rito?” He showed me his powerbank.

Right. That was dumb! Sayang sa gas!

“No, I checked the site. I am very hands-on, you know?” Maarteng sabi ko.

“If you want updates about the construction, just send me a message. I am the

one in-charge here. I will take care of the workers, don’t worry,” he assured

me. “If they need anything, I will inform you.”

“Send you a message?” I almost laughed. “Where? Instagram?”

He licked his lower lip a little and raised a brow, wondering why I was

laughing. Tinigil ko tuloy ang pag-tawa ko at sineryoso ang mukha. The side of

his lips rose before giving me his calling card.

I looked at it. May logo ng Valeria Group sa harapan. Sa likod ‘yung

information sa kanya.

Engr. Sebastian Vincent Camero

Engineering Department Head | Civil Engineer

And there was the company address, his phone number, company website, and his

business e-mail. Wow, he really looked so professional now, huh?

“Thank you for this,” I gave him a small smile before putting his card on my

wallet. Kumuha rin ako ng calling card at binigay sa kanya. “Here’s mine.”

He didn’t bother looking at it. Nilapag niya lang sa table niya, malapit sa

laptop.

“Is that your food?” I pointed at the lunch box on his table.

“Hindi, binigay lang ni Engineer Ramos,” he looked at it for a second.

“You haven’t eaten yet?” I curiously asked.

Kumunot ang noo niya saglit, nagtataka kung bakit kailangan ko pa itanong

‘yon. I suddenly had the urge to defend myself but I was scared that I would

bluff again! Hindi na lang ako nagsalita at hinintay ang sagot niya.

“Hindi pa,” he answered in his deep voice.

“Okay,” I nodded and gave him a small smile. “You guys should eat. Uhm.. I

should go now.”

He didn’t talk so naglakad na ‘ko palabas ng office. My eyes widened when I

saw Engineer Lavin and Engineer Castillo on the door. They panicked and

pretended that they were looking at the blueprint.

“Ang ganda ng panahon ngayon, ano, Engineer?!” Engineer Lavin exaggerated.

“Bobo mo, pre,” Engineer Castillo replied.

I laughed before walking away. Sumakay ako sa kotse ko at nag-drive na pabalik

ng Manila. I ate my late lunch at the office and then umuwi na ‘ko. I felt

lonely again upon entering the large mansion. It was full of expensive pieces

of furniture but it still felt empty. Nakabukas nga lahat ng ilaw pero

pakiramdam ko ang dilim.

“Should I get a new dog?” I asked myself while taking my shoes off.

Jewel already died last year because of her old age. I cried and cried while

burying her beside my mother. My brother was there to comfort me, though. He

also loved the dog kahit maikling panahon niya lang nakasama.

“Ida,” I called her after taking a shower.

[Hey! What’s wrong?] Bungad niya kaagad.

“Nothing. I just feel lonely,” I smiled by myself, looking at the ceiling. “I

feel so alone, you know? I got no one else but myself.”

[Hey, don’t say that! You have me! Medyo long distance relationship pero goods

lang! Just wait. I’ll finish my work here and then dyan na ‘ko sa Philippine

branch namin magwowork!]

“Should I find a smaller house? Should I move out?” I asked her. “Maybe it was

because of this.. large space, and also the memories here. I should move out.”

[Saan ka naman titira, huh? Super hassle mag-design ng bagong unit, you know!]

“Right,” I chuckled. “I’m too busy now I can’t even eat properly.”

[What?! No! You should eat, okay?! Don’t do that to yourself! ‘Yan ka nanaman,

Eli, ha! We already talked about this.] She sounded like my mom scolding me.

“Yes, Ma’am,” I laughed. “I will try to eat properly. Anyway, I’m serious

about.. moving out. I can’t live here anymore. The space is too large but I

feel suffocated. Hahanap na lang ako ng condo near our company.”

[You already have one, actually.] She started laughing like a crazy woman.

“What?” My brows furrowed, confused.

[Your condo!] She repeated. [Technically, you paid for that so it should be

yours!]

“What-” My eyes widened when I realized what she was talking about. “Are you

fucking kidding me?! Why would I live there?! We.. We did so many things

there!”

[Less hassle. Renovate it or something! For sure, hindi na siya roon nakatira!

He’s an engineer. He probably has his own house now if afford niya bumili ng

car or what. Sayang ang pera kung walang nakatira roon! Maintenance fee,

hello? Binabayaran pa rin!]

“Maybe he already sold it?” I tried again.

[He wouldn’t. He would ask for your permission first kung balak niyang ibenta,

just out of respect, you know. I mean, mas marami binayaran mo roon so it

could be yours now.]

“You’re right. Maganda pa location,” I bit my lower lip. “Okay. I’ll.. think

about it.”

I had so many plans for that condo unit, but still didn’t act on it. The next

day was a Sunday so nag-yoga ako outside the house, just to calm my brain and

heart. After that, I went to the mall to go shopping.

I was wearing a white turtle neck sweater, black pants, and Gucci belt since

naka-tuck in ako. I also paired it with a pair of white heels, a floral black

bag, and shades. My hair was in a high ponytail and my lips were in velvet

red.

“Hi, can I get a stock of this one?” I pointed at a Givenchy bag.

“Elyse?”

My eyes widened when I saw Samantha Vera. She smiled wider and gave me a soft

hug. Inalis ko tuloy ang shades ko para makita ko siya nang maayos. Wow, she

looked taller. Wala masyadong nagbago sa mukha niya. She still looked like a

model.

“How are you? I heard you were out of the country for years,” she said.

“Yeah, I wanted to travel,” I gave her a smile. “Ikaw? How are you? I heard

your club was successful. That’s good!”

“Yes, you should actually stop by! Just message me on Instagram if you want to

visit. I’ll reserve you a table and I can also give free drinks. Bring your

friends!” She sounded excited.

Oh, I don’t have any friends. That sounded lonely so hindi ko na lang

sinabi.

“Tita-Ninang!” I heard a little girl.

My lips parted when I saw a beautiful kid with long dark brown hair, almond-

shaped eyes, long lashes, perfect nose and lips, and a gorgeous smile. Her

hair was braided and she was wearing a cute dress.

“Timezone, please?” The girl pouted.

“Oh my gosh,” I covered my mouth a little. “Avrielle.”

“Huh?” Avi looked at me, confused. “Hello po!”

“Avi, this is Tita Eli. You already met her noong baby ka but you probably

don’t remember now. You have pictures with her,” pagpapakilala ni Sam.

“I know, Tita! Wait, let me.. Uh..” She held her chin and looked up, thinking.

Parang may light bulb na nag-appear bigla sa ulo niya nang ngumiti siya

sa’kin. “Tito Sevi! Diba?! Sa pictures! She was hmmm!”

“Oh god,” Sam looked stressed while covering Avi’s mouth. “I’m sorry, Eli!

She’s a kid! She doesn’t know-”

“Okay lang, Sam,” I laughed. “She’s so bright.. and talkative.”

“Sobra,” Sam gave me an apologetic smile. “I’ll take this kid to Timezone

first. It was nice seeing you again.”

“Where are her parents?” I asked curiously.

“God, hindi ko alam! Nawala na lang bigla after our lunch. You know those two!

Araw-araw honeymoon, gosh!” She rolled her eyes.

“No, Mommy went out to look for a dress. Sinamahan siya ni Daddy,” singit ulit

ni Avi.

“Bye, Eli!” Sam said, pulling Avi away.

Binili ko na ‘yung bag at lumabas na ulit ng store. I bought more clothes

before I decided to go home. I was sitting alone at the living room, watching

a movie. It was so boring and lonely I had to consider Sam’s invite sa club

niya.

“I can’t go there alone,” I talked to myself. “I would look like a damn loner.

Should I invite my employees?”

Why the hell would I ask my employees to party with me? They would probably

just feel awkward kapag nandoon ako. Oh gosh, at that moment, I realized how

lonely I was. I went back to my bedroom to pack my things. Good for 1 week

lang ang dinala ko. I wanted to see if I could really move out.

I also took a shower and changed my clothes. I wanted to party tonight. I

texted Alice if she was available and she said yes. Alice was the closest to

my age. May pakiramdam din ako na party girl siya because of her energy and

looks.

“Kuya Roel, sa condo ko.. noon. Ilalapag ko lang gamit ko,” I told him.

Nagpahatid ako kay Kuya Roel dahil baka malasing ako mamaya. Nakakatakot na. I

can’t even drive without Waze, mag-drive pa kaya nang nakainom?!

I was so nervous when I opened the door of our unit, pulling my small luggage

with me. Nakahinga ako nang maluwag nang makitang madilim at walang tao. I

opened the lights and looked around.

I was surprised to see that there were changes in the interior design of the

unit. Wala pa ring tao, though. I placed my luggage on the living room and

went out again because Alice called.

[Madam! I'm here na!] Tuwang tuwang sabi niya.

"Yes, I'm on my way!" Nagmamadaling sabi ko. "Kuya Roel, sa club na. Here's

the address," I showed him my phone.

I was so nervous. My last party was in U.S.A with Ida. It was so wild there

parang na culture shock ako. Hindi ko lang alam kung ganoon din dito. Ida

enjoyed it so much because I got so drunk I couldn't stand up anymore. At that

moment, I knew how low my alcohol tolerance was.

I was wearing a black fitted dress and black heels. I let my soft-curled grey

hair down and just put a silver pin so it wouldn't go over my face. I messaged

Sam earlier and sabi niya susunduin niya raw ako.

"Madam!" Alice waved her hand when she saw me.

Oh god, it was weird to see her in her party clothes. She was wearing a black

bralette and white skirt. Her hair was in a ponytail and her makeup looked

bomb. Mas sanay siya sa'kin sa ganito!

"Just call me Elyse outside office. Madam is awkward," I whispered.

"Mas sanay ako sa Madam, Madam," she laughed. "I can't call my boss with her

first name!"

"Okay, ikaw bahala," I shrugged.

"Elyse!" I heard Sam's voice. Napalingon ako at nakita siyang naglalakad

palapit. She gave me a kiss on the cheek, pati si Alice. Naguluhan tuloy ang

secretary ko. "Hello! I'm Samantha Vera!"

"S-samantha Vera," Alice stuttered. She looked so surprised to see a model in

front of her. "Oh my god."

"Hello? Hi?" Alice didn't answer. She was just staring at Sam. "Uhm, Eli, I

think she's.. Uh.. Broken," Sam gave me a nervous smile. My secretary suddenly

stopped functioning.

"Alice," I whispered and pinched her a little so she would come back to her

senses.

“Samantha Vera!” Parang natauhan si Alice at nakipagkamay. “What a pleasure to

meet you! I am your fan! I follow you on Instagram! I like your pictures! I

also bought the perfume you endorsed!”

“Oh, wow, flattering,” Sam giggled. “Thank you. Let’s go?”

“Madam, friend mo siya?!” Alice whispered on me habang nakasunod kami kay Sam.

“Uhm, she’s literally friends with everyone,” I scratched my head a little.

“So friend ko na siya?” She looked thrilled. “Oh my gosh.”

I heard the loud noise and the smell of liquor. Napadaan din kami sa smoking

area so I covered my nose a little. Sam gestured us to sit on a small couch,

since dalawa lang naman kami ni Alice. She talked to a waiter and then

suddenly may apat na bottles na kami sa table.

“Enjoy, girls! I’ll talk to my friends lang!” Paalam ni Sam.

“Alice,” tawag ko pagkakuha ko ng bottle. “What the hell is this?”

“Ako bahala sa’yo, Madam!” She stood up and asked for softdrinks.

Alice started mixing the liquor with the energy drink. Nagsalin na rin siya ng

tequila at binigyan ako ng lemon so I could take a shot. Hindi naman talaga

ako umiinom! I felt nervous. I might go crazy here.

“Sige, Madam! Ubusin natin ‘to!” Alice was so excited.

I was already on my 10th shot when a group of guys went to us to introduce

themselves. Alice welcomed them with open arms! Pinaupo pa niya sa couch

namin. I was so confused! Bakit sila nakikiupo?! What is happening?!

“Oh, si Madam? Yes, she’s single,” I heard Alice’s voice. “But she’s not

interested.”

I took a shot again. I could feel my head spinning. I was confident dahil

nakatayo si Kuya Roel sa may gilid, watching over me.

“I should dance!” I yelled at Alice.

“Dance?! Tara, Madam! Dance tayo!” Excited na tumayo si Alice at hinatak ako

papuntang dance floor.

I started dancing. Hindi ko na alam kung anong pinag gagagawa ko. Some men

would flock on me and dance with me. I couldn’t care less. Alice would shoo

them away immediately.

“You look young,” the man gave me a glass of liquor.

“Did you put anything here?” Sumingkit ang mata ko at tinignan ang alak.

“What? Of course not!” He shook his head. “It’s just whiskey.”

“Ahuh?! I have my bodyguard here with me, okay?! If you’re planning to do

anything, forget it! Also, my brother is a prosecutor! You’re dead!” I pointed

at his face, drunk.

“Madam, tara na,” Alice was laughing while pulling me away. “Sorry, sa inyo na

‘yan,” binalik niya ang basong hawak ko.

Kinuha ni Alice ang bag ko at hinatak ako palabas. Kuya Roel followed us from

behind and they both helped me get inside the car. Humiga ako sa backseat

buong byahe.

“Kuya Roel, I don’t want to go home,” I almost cried. “Go to my condo. My

things are there. Please? I can walk! I promise you!”

“Okay, Ma’am,” he nodded.

That was what he did. Hinatid niya ‘ko sa lobby and I showed him that I can

walk. He gave me a small smile and watched over me until makasakay ako sa

elevator. I sighed heavily and put my forehead against the wall while waiting

for it to go up.

“Oh gosh,” I whispered when I felt my stomach turning. I thought of other

things para hindi ako masuka.

Nilabas ko ang susi ko nang makalabas ng elevator. I started walking like a

drunk woman along the hallway. I would stop to hold my head. My vision was

spinning. It was also a little blurry.

I opened the door of my unit and went inside. As soon as I closed the door, I

put my back against it, breathing heavily.

“Oh god, I will never do this ag-”

My eyes widened when the bathroom door opened and it revealed Sevi putting a

towel on his waist. He was so shocked to see me that he suddenly let go of the

towel and it fell on the floor.

My jaw dropped.

“WHAT THE FUCK?!” I screamed.

Sevi immediately got the towel again from the floor to cover his body. I

panicked and turned my back against him before covering my eyes.

“OH MY GOD, BASTOS! FUCK YOU! MANYAK! OH MY GOD, MOMMY!” I started yelling at

the door, tearing up a little because of alcohol.

“Putangina,” Sevi muttered a curse.

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“Put something on for Pete’s sake! This is not allowed!”

I was still covering my eyes, facing the door. I didn’t hear Sevi’s response

anymore so dahan-dahan akong lumingon at hindi na siya nakita. The door of the

walk-in closet was already closed, meaning he was inside. I sighed heavily and

held my head. It was spinning again.

“Fuck alcohol,” bulong ko sa sarili ko bago humiga sa sofa.

I closed my eyes and put my legs over the armrest. Nakahubad na ang isang

sapatos ko at suot ko pa ‘yung isa. I thought I already got sober for a minute

but I felt my stomach turning again I had to run inside the bathroom to vomit.

“I hate my life,” I held my head again.

Nakasandal ako sa bowl kahit napindot ko na ang flush, inaabangan ko lang kung

mayroon pa. I remembered the smell of liquor and my stomach turned again. I

muttered a curse before letting it out again. The smell made me more dizzy.

I heard someone enter the bathroom but I didn’t bother looking at him. Malapit

nang bumagsak ang ulo ko sa bowl kakasuka ko. He held a handful of my hair and

caressed my back to help me.

“Saan ka uminom?” Sevi asked in a serious voice.

“Sam’s,” I said, trying to reach for the tissue.

Sevi got it for me. I flushed again before looking at him. He sighed heavily

and helped me wipe my mouth with the tissue. He was already wearing a pair of

sweatpants and a black shirt. He helped me stand up so he could wash my face.

“Iinom ka tapos hindi mo naman pala kaya,” he sounded mad.

“Hey, nasisinghot ko ‘yung water!” I hit him lightly on his chest. Pakiramdam

ko nalunod ako sa kakahugas niya ng mukha ko.

He opened the cabinet and got me a small towel so I could wipe my face. I did

but my hands were so weak he got impatient, siya na ang nagpunas.

“I can do it, okay?!” Inagaw ko ang towel at naglakad palabas.

I was walking like a penguin because I was still wearing a heel on my right

foot. Ang gulo pa ng buhok ko at tumataas na ang maikli kong dress. I fell on

the couch and closed my eyes again, still holding the towel.

“Hay, pucha,” I heard Sevi’s frustrated voice.

My eyes widened when I suddenly felt like I was floating. Sevi carried me to

the other bathroom inside our bedroom and placed me on the countertop. Nakaupo

ako roon na parang bata at nakatingin sa kanya habang kumukuha siya ng bagong

stock ng toothbrush.

He took my hair pins off and gathered my hair in one hand while he was trying

to find a hair tie. Good thing I think I left one sa may cabinet. He tied my

hair in a ponytail before putting toothpaste on the brush.

“Ngiti,” galit na sabi niya sa’kin.

“How can I smile if you’re saying it that way?!” I wanted to cry.

“Mahabagin,” he closed his eyes and massaged his head.

“Are you going to brush my teeth, huh?!” I kicked his leg a little.

He was so tall kahit nakaupo ako sa countertop, mas matangkad pa rin siya

sa’kin. Memories of him brushing my teeth filled my head so I felt a little

pain on my chest.

“Say ‘ih’,” he showed it to me.

“Ih,” I unconsciously mimicked his move.

He held my chin so my head wouldn’t fall back down while he was carefully

brushing my teeth. My brows furrowed as I watched him become so focused on it

like he was playing a serious game.

“Aroko na,” reklamo ko.

He rolled his eyes before carrying me again and putting me down on the floor.

Hinayaan niya ‘kong magmumog. Akala ko roon na matatapos ‘yun pero kinuha niya

ang cleanser niya sa gilid para mapunasan ang mukha ko.

“You’re so annoying! I want to sleep!” I yelled at him, obviously drunk.

“Mas nakakainis ka. Ako rin gusto ko na matulog,” hindi siya nagpatalo.

“Bakit ka ba nandito, ha?!” I glared at him.

“Wow,” he exclaimed in disbelief. “Ikaw dapat tanungin ko nyan. Susulpot ka

rito bigla tapos lasing ka pa? Bakit? Dito ka dinala ng GPS mo?”

“What’s a GPS?” I tilted my head a little to the right.

“Ano? Hindi mo alam ‘yon?” His brows furrowed.

“Would I ask you if I know?! Ha?! Just answer!” I pushed him a little with my

weak hands.

“Bakit galit ka?” He raised a brow.

“Because when I went inside this damn unit, I wasn’t expecting see a dick!” I

shouted at him.

“Hindi rin ako nag-expect ng lasing na babaeng magwawala pagkalabas ko ng

shower,” he shot back.

“So what’s a GPS?!” I went back to the topic.

“‘Yung totoo? C.E.O ka nyan?” Nagtatakang tanong niya sa’kin. “‘Yung sa

sasakyan. ‘Yung parang mapa. Anong hindi mo alam?”

“Oh my god, that’s called Waze, you dumbass!” I laughed hysterically.

“Ano? Ewan ko sa’yo,” he shook his head. “Lakas ng tama mo!”

Pinunasan niya ang mukha ko gamit ang cotton pad para matanggal ang makeup ko.

After that, he washed my face and carried me again towards the bedroom. It was

still the same bed we used to sleep together in.

He left the room to get my luggage. Binuksan niya ‘yon at kumuha ng damit ko.

My underwear and a pair of pajamas. Pagkatapos, nilapag niya sa gilid ng kama.

“Magbihis ka,” utos niya sa’kin. “Ang dumi mo tapos hihiga ka sa kama ko.”

What?! Was that an insult?! And anong sabi niya about the bed?!

“Kama mo?! Excuse me!” I scoffed. “We paid for this!”

“Magbihis ka na,” he repeated.

“With you here?!” I almost threw the pillow. “Go out! Not because I saw your

dick, you’re also allowed to see my breasts!”

“Amputa,” Sevi whispered.

He sighed again before leaving the room. I stood up and tried to find a new

towel before going inside the bathroom. I was getting a little sober so I

managed to wash my body briefly before putting my underwear and pajamas on. I

refused to wear a bra because I couldn’t sleep wearing it.

I went back to the room and let my body fall on the bed. I closed my eyes and

hugged a pillow, ready to sleep. Narinig kong bumukas ang pinto kaya dumilat

ako nang kaunti. Sevi got himself a pillow and a blanket before turning the

lights off and leaving the room again. Then, I dozed off to sleep.

I woke up with a headache. Pagkadilat ko, hindi kaagad nag sink in sa’kin kung

nasaan ako. My eyes widened and looked around. I held my head as I tried to

remember how the hell did I get here last night? Nananaginip pa ba ‘ko?!

I reached for the glass of water on the side table before slowly getting out

of the room. I looked around and saw no one. Wait, Sevi was here last night,

right?! Iyon ang nasa memory ko! Nasaan na siya?

I looked at the time and gasped.

“Fuck! I have work!” I ran inside the bathroom.

Nagmamadali akong naligo at bumalik sa kwarto para magbihis. I was wearing a

black turtle neck long sleeves and a grey pencil skirt. I put my heels on and

wore my shades. Wala akong time kaya powder, lip tint, at blush lang ang

nalagay ko sa mukha ko. Since I didn’t have my car with me, I just walked!

I was calling Kuya Roel while walking.

“Good morning, Miss Ledezma,” the guard on the lobby welcomed me. “Wala po

atang sasakyan ngayon?”

“Yeah,” I gave him a small smile.

[Ma’am?] Kuya Roel answered.

“Kuya Roel, can you get me my car, please? Paiwan na lang sa parking. Call me

if nandito ka na,” I said while walking. Hindi ko na napansin ang mga

bumabating empleyado dahil abala sa phone.

[Okay po, Ma’am.]

Sumakay ako sa elevator at bumaba sa floor ng office ko. Alice was already

there, smiling at me. Mabuti pa siya, maagang nagising! My gosh!

Stupid Sevi! Alam nang may meeting kami ngayon, hindi man lang ako ginising!

What the hell!

“Madam, late na po kayo sa meeting. Naroon na po sa board room lahat,” Alice

reminded me.

“Yeah, okay, let’s go,” I nodded. “I’m sorry. I had a.. hard night.”

“Same,” she laughed.

Hindi na ‘ko nag abalang ilapag ang gamit ko sa office at dumiretso na lang

kami sa board room. When I entered the room, everyone went silent. They stood

up and bowed their heads a little to welcome me. I looked at my watch and

realized that I was 10 minutes late. Damn, I felt embarrassed.

“I apologize for being late. I know everyone still has work to do. Thank you

for waiting,” I said before sitting down.

I glared at Engineer Camero who was smirking playfully while reading the

folder in front of him. He was wearing a grey button-down polo partnered with

black slacks. He looked fresh while I looked like a damn mess.

I just asked for updates regarding the beach resort. May kaunting changes din

na prinesent ang Finance dahil sa pagbabago ng design. I couldn’t listen

carefully because I felt like my head was being pounded.

“Coffee, Madam,” Alice gave me a cup of coffee.

“Thank you,” I whispered before taking a sip.

I looked at Sevi while he was listening to the presenter. When he noticed me

staring, he looked back at me and raised a brow. I rolled my eyes and

pretended that I was reading something.

“Thank you, Miss Palermo,” I nodded. “What are your thoughts, Engineer

Camero?”

He raised his brows when I suddenly called him. I smirked as everyone turned

to him, waiting for his answer. He looked so calm and composed. Hindi man lang

siya nagulat na tinawag ko siya.

“I think the budget is big and enough for.. 2 years? Sooner or later, we would

have to request for more because we will adjust to some changes during the

construction. However, we still can’t predict what will happen. As much as

possible, we will try our best to follow,” he said while playing with his pen.

“Thank you, Engineer Camero,” I said, not actually listening. I was just

staring at him. “How about you, Miss Ong?”

Maaga rin kaming natapos dahil hinihintay na ‘ko ni Kuya Roel sa parking. I

rolled my eyes when I saw Sevi also waiting for the elevator. Sabay kaming

pumasok nang bumukas iyon. Pinindot niya ang floor ng parking kaya hindi na

‘ko pumindot. Unti-unti nang naubos ang employees hanggang sa kami na lang ang

natirang bababa sa parking.

“Don’t you have a house?” I asked him.

“May design na. Hindi pa tapos,” seryosong sabi niya. “Ikaw? Wala kang bahay?”

“I have,” I swallowed hard.

But it was too.. lonely. Empty. Dark.

Bumukas ang elevator kaya naputol ang pag-uusap namin. Nauna akong lumabas sa

kanya at hinanap si Kuya Roel. I saw him standing beside my car, holding my

keys. I smiled at him while walking.

“Thank you, Kuya Roel,” kinuha ko ang susi ko sa kanya.

“Nakauwi po ba kayo nang maayos, Ma’am?” He asked.

“Yes, thank you,” I nodded. “I might stay in the condo for a week.”

Sevi suddenly stopped walking when he heard what I just said. I looked at him

and raised a brow, naghahamon sa kanya. He put his tongue on the insides of

his cheek and shook his head before opening the door of his car.

“Hi Kuya Roel,” he greeted.

“Hello, Engineer,” Kuya Roel smiled at him.

“Pakituruan nga ng GPS ‘yan. Baka nga bluetooth sa sasakyan hindi pa niya

alam,” Sevi insulted before getting inside his car.

“How dare you!” I shouted but he already closed the door.

“Hindi niyo po alam ‘yon, Ma’am?” Kuya Roel looked so surprised. Why do they

like making me look dumb?! “Halika po sa loob. Ituturo ko.”

I pouted before getting inside my car. I just bought this car and I was out of

the country for two weeks! Hindi ko naman siya masyadong nagamit. Nakakainis

naman!

“Ito po ang bluetooth, Ma’am. Pwede niyong i-connect ang phone niyo sa

speakers tapos pwede rin kayo sumagot ng call sa screen,” he showed it to me.

“Ito naman po ang GPS. Minsan nagloloko ‘yan, minsan hindi. Depende po, Ma’am

sa sasakyan. Mukha namang maayos ‘yung sasakyan niyo.”

“What?” My brows furrowed. “Why would I use that, then? Baka mas lalo pa ‘kong

maligaw dyan! I’m dumb, Kuya Roel! I can’t follow. Oh no, I’m dumb,” I held my

head, getting stressed out.

“In case lang po,” he chuckled. “Tapos ito po sa volume, tapos ito radio,

tapos ito po sa aircon. Pwede niyo rin po i-connect phone niyo gamit ‘yung

cord, tapos pwede niyo ma-activate si Siri sa steering wheel.”

“What? Damn, that’s possible?” I looked at him innocently. “Bakit walang

ganoon sa car natin dati?”

“Luma na po ‘yon,” he laughed.

“I’ll buy you a new car, Kuya Roel,” I gave him a thumbs up. “Kailan birthday

mo?”

“Ah, tapos na po ang birthday ko,” he replied, scratching his head a little.

“Anong tapos na? Wala nang next birthday?” My brows furrowed. “Isang beses ka

lang nagbibirthday, Kuya Roel?”

“Isang beses sa isang taon, Ma’am,” he answered.. obviously.

Tinuro niya pa sa’kin ang ibang controls. Para akong batang nasa driving

school ulit! After that, I already went back to work, thinking of buying Kuya

Roel a new car. Nakatulala lang ako at nag-iisip kung ano ang magandang ibigay

sa kanya.

He was like a father figure to me, though he probably treated me like his boss

or something. I still cared for him like a family, maybe because he was the

only one left in the house. Siya na lang ang familiar sa'kin. Everyone already

vanished.

I heard a knock on my door so I came back to my senses.

"Elyse," Austin went inside. "Have you eaten your lunch yet? I heard late ka

kanina. Are you okay? May nangyari ba?"

"Ang dami mong tanong," I massaged my head. Dumadagdag pa siya sa problema ko.

"You look pale," he pointed it out. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I am okay," I nodded. "Don't worry. Also, kakain ako mamaya. I just need to

finish my work. I have a damn hangover."

"Did you drink last night?" His brows furrowed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why would I tell you?" I raised a brow.

"Sana sumama ako," he chuckled. "Next time na iinom ka, I'll go with you,

okay? I will take care of you."

"Yeah, okay, fine," I nodded and gestured him to leave.

Alice placed my packed lunch on my table. May sarili akong meal plan dahil

diet ako. I wanted to maintain my body. I took a break to eat my food and then

went back to work again. I went home around 7 PM. Takot pa ‘kong buksan ang

pinto ng unit dahil baka naroon si Sevi.

“Oh, he’s not here,” nakahinga ako nang maluwag.

The pillow and blanket was placed neatly on the sofa-bed inside the study

room. Our study room. I think I noticed a new computer, too. Hindi na ‘yung

bigay ni Daddy. Of course. Of course he will throw that out. I would kung

hindi niya pa ginawa.

The study room still had two desks. One for him and one for me, pero ‘yung

desk ko puno na lang ng files niya and ‘yung sa kanya, computer lang. Sa

gilid, may sofa-bed. The interior didn’t change that much. Wala nga lang ‘yung

mga libro ko sa shelf dahil kinuha ko noon.

The walk-in closet also looked empty without my things. He invaded one of my

shelves to put his clothes, though. Dumadami na rin ang sapatos niyang naka-

display. He tried to maximize the space by spreading his things around. Hindi

niya pinagsiksikan sa shelf niya.

Our bedroom still looked the same, pero wala na ‘yung pictures namin sa side

table, and iba na rin ang kulay ng bed sheet. He probably didn’t want to

remember me anymore. He also changed the couch and oh, he added a painting.

“Wait,” naglakad ako palapit nang mapansing familiar ang painting.

It was the painting I pointed at last time! Sa exhibit. He bought it and

placed it here? So sinunod niya nga ang sinabi ko?

I started to clean the condo. Wala naman masyadong lilinisin dahil malinis

naman. Marami rin siyang stock ng groceries. I stared at the kitchen and

remembered my mom. Lahat ng naroon, binigay ni Mommy sa amin. My heart hurt

again.

She was so happy for us.. and I failed her.

I wiped the tears in my eyes using my hand. I ended up crying inside the

bathroom again. The water calmed me down. I convinced myself that nothing will

still change kahit iiyak ko lahat ng dugo ko rito. Everything was still the

same, and all along I was the only one who was desperate to see a change, and

so I changed myself.

Umupo ako sa kama at kinuha ang phone ko.

To: Engineer Camero

Can I stay here for the meantime

From: Engineer Camero

Okay. Huwag kang mag alala, hindi ako uuwi.

To: Engineer Camero

Wru? Everything alright?

From: Engineer Camero

Hotel sa Batangas.

Hindi na ‘ko nagreply. He really really hated to stay with me in the same

room, huh? Nag-book pa siya ng hotel doon para hindi umuwi rito. That was a

smart move.

I slept peacefully that night and went to work early. I was wearing a white

blouse and grey slacks. I felt lazy to dress up. Austin wanted us to visit the

site with his dad, the Chairman, so I was wearing a pair of white sandals para

hindi ako mahirapan sa buhangin.

“Let’s not waste gas. Kotse ko na gamitin natin,” he told me. “Dad has his own

driver. Susunod siya kaagad.”

“Yeah, okay. Tinatamad din akong mag-drive,” I opened the shotgun door.

“Okay ka lang ba talaga? You still look pale,” he said in a worry. “Are you

eating?”

“I forgot to eat dinner last night but I’m fine,” I assured him.

“Did you eat breakfast?” He asked before starting the engine.

“Tea,” maikling sagot ko. “Sa Batangas na ‘ko kakain ng lunch. May dala akong

food.”

Hindi na siya nagsalita at nag-drive na lang paalis. Inantok ako kaya natulog

na lang ako buong byahe. It was really hard travelling back and forth. Good

thing wala masyadong traffic. Austin was also a fast-driver so mabilis din

kaming nakarating. I retouched my makeup and put a lollipop inside my mouth

when I saw one inside Austin’s car.

“Hello, Tito,” I smiled at Tito Anthony, Austin’s dad. The chairman of the

board. “This way, please.”

“Who’s assigned to this project?” He asked me.

“Oh, Architect Rosario is working with Engineer Camero from VGC. I also check

the progress from time-to-time. I’m very hands-on,” I answered.

“No need to do that, Elyse. Ako na lang ang pupunta rito para i-check,” singit

ni Austin sa usapan.

“No, I mean, kapag hindi lang ako busy,” I defended.

“I thought you’re too busy to even eat, huh?” He raised a brow. “Kung kaya

mong pumuntang Batangas mula Manila, kaya mo rin kumain.”

“Whatever,” I rolled my eyes.

The employees panicked when they saw Austin’s dad. They gathered in one place

to greet him. I looked around and saw Sevi talking to another engineer.

Lumapit din siya nang makitang nagkakagulo sa banda namin.

“Engineer Camero, right?” Austin’s dad offered his hand. “I’m the chairman of

the company. Anthony Guerrero.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Sir,” Sevi shook Tito Anthony’s hand.

“We’re doing a random inspection of the site,” Austin said.

Sevi looked at him and raised a brow, not saying anything. He just turned his

back against us and called Engineer Lavin to guide us like we were visitors. I

scoffed and looked away. Hindi ko na kailangan sumama paikot. Nakita ko na

‘yon.

“I’m hungry, Austin. Kayo na lang ang umikot. I want to eat,” I excused

myself.

“It’s better if you just stay inside the office. It’s too hot out here.

Susunod ako," Austin tapped my shoulder.

I nodded and went inside the air-conditioned office. Sevi didn't even look

shocked when he saw me inside. I sat on the monoblock and placed my lunch on

the table, just staring at it. Hindi naman talaga ako gutom.

Sevi went to his table to find a document. He was wearing a white short-

sleeved polo with three buttons opened and a pair of black pants. He was also

wearing a pair of black safety shoes. Ang hard hat niya ay nakapatong sa table

niya.

"Engineer," I looked at Bianca when she suddenly entered the office. She was

holding a paper bag. Napatigil siya nang makita ako sa loob. "Oh, hello, Miss

Ledezma."

"Hi," I gave her a small fake smile.

"Bakit?" Sevi asked, still browsing on his computer while standing.

"I packed you a lunch, kung nagugutom ka. Hindi ka pa kumakain, e," Bianca

gave him a smile before putting the paper bag on his table.

"Salamat pero busog pa 'ko," Sevi chuckled. "Nag-breakfast ako kanina."

“Ganoon ba? Tikman mo pa rin kapag nagutom ka! Masarap ‘yan!” Bianca said.

“Sige na, balik na ‘ko roon.”

When she left, I rolled my eyes and whispered insults. Nag-iba bigla ang boses

niya noong si Sevi ang kausap, ah! It was so obvious that she liked him! I

didn’t know if Sevi knew about it or manhid lang talaga siya.. Or maybe gusto

niya rin naman.

“Masarap,” I scoffed. “As if.”

“Kumain ka na dyan,” seryosong sabi ni Sevi.

“Salamat pero busog pa ‘ko,” I mocked him. “Nag-breakfast ako kanina.”

He shook his head and ignored me again. I crossed my arms over my chest and

stared at my food again, trying to bring back my appetite. Nakakainis na

Bianca! Nawalan tuloy ako ng gana! My gosh!

Sevi turned his computer off before pulling the chair adjacent to my side. I

looked at him when he sat down and leaned on his chair.

“Hindi ka pa kakain?” He raised a brow.

“Why? You want my meal?” My brows furrowed. “Takaw mo naman! Bakit hindi ‘yun

‘yung kainin mo?” I pointed at the paper bag Bianca gave.

“Bakit galit ka?” Nagtatakang tanong niya. “Busog nga ako.”

“Masarap ba siya magluto?” I asked him.

“Bakit mo tinatanong? Ikaw ata ang may gusto,” he stood up to get the paper

bag. “Oh, sayo na.”

“Ew, hell no!” I made a disgusted face. “That’s yours! Eat that! Sabi niya,

hindi ka pa naglulunch! Paano ka mabubusog?!”

“At ikaw?” Paghahamon niya.

“I lost my appetite,” I glared at the paper bag.

“Kaka-inom mo ‘yan,” he rolled his eyes.

“I drank once!” I defended myself. “I didn’t know I would be so damn wasted.

My alcohol tolerance is so low pala. Anyway, next time kapag uminom kami ni

Austin, I think I will improve na-”

“Kumain ka na,” he cut me off.

He stood up and placed the paper bag back to his table before leaving me

inside his office. What? Ang bastos talaga niya kausap! I was just trying to

start a conversation! I rolled my eyes and opened my packed lunch.

“Oh, you’re eating. That’s good,” Austin placed his own lunch on the table.

Sinabayan niya ‘kong kumain. His dad was still roaming around and talking to

some engineers. I forced myself to finish my food before placing it back to my

paper bag.

“Aalis lang kami ni Dad. May imemeet kaming business partner sa malapit na

hotel. Do you want to come?” Austin asked.

“No, I can stay here,” I gave him a nod.

“I’ll be back, okay?” He assured me before leaving.

I went out of the office because I got bored after he left. I walked towards

the beach and stopped before I reached the wet sand. Tinakpan ko nang kaunti

ang mata ko habang tinatanaw ang dagat. The sky was turning dark. It was so

peaceful.. so calm.. until the rain poured.

“Fuck!” Niyakap ko kaagad ang bag ko at tumakbo pabalik, nahihirapan pa dahil

sa buhangin.

Palakas na nang palakas ang ulan at nababasa na ‘ko. I stopped walking when

Sevi suddenly put a hard hat on my head before pulling my arm. Pumasok kami sa

office nila at pinatay niya ang aircon para hindi lamigin. He was busy calling

other people.

“Mukhang hindi pa titigil, e. Bukas na lang ituloy,” he said while getting a

towel inside his drawer. “Sabi zero percent ang chance of rain ngayon? Poser.”

Binato niya sa banda ko kaya sinalo ko naman at pinunas sa sarili ko. Sevi was

busy with his phone while his other hand was unbuttoning his wet polo. I

looked away and continued wiping myself. I covered my chest with my hand when

I noticed that my black bra was already showing through my wet blouse.

“E-engineer Camero,” I called nervously.

Sevi ended the call and looked at me, waiting for my question. He took his

polo off his shoulders, still looking at me.

“Do you have an extra shirt? Uhm,” I looked down on my chest. He unconsciously

looked at it, too.

Bumukas bigla ang pinto at sumilip si Engineer Lavin. “Engineer! Pinapatawag

mo raw-”

“Labas,” Sevi threw a random box on him.

“Huh?!” Engineer Lavin looked so confused. “Okay! Pinapatawag mo ‘ko tapos

papaalisin mo ‘ko! Labo, master!”

I shyly turned around so Engineer Lavin wouldn’t see my chest. Humarap ako kay

Sevi nang narinig kong sumara ulit ang pinto. He went to me and handed me a

shirt.

“Thank you,” I turned around and went inside their little restroom.

Pagkalabas ko, nagbibihis na siya ng white shirt. Ang dami naman niyang baon.

His shirt looked oversized so I tuck it inside my pants. He looked at me and

got his keys.

“Nasaan na kasama mo?” Seryosong tanong niya.

“Oh, they went out to meet someone. I think.. they will be back,” I looked at

my phone.

“Pabalik na ‘kong Manila,” kinuha niya ang mga gamit niya.

“Okay,” I nodded and stayed on my seat.

He stopped in front of the door to look at me again.

“Hindi ka sasabay?” He raised a brow.

“Oh, right! I will!” Tumayo kaagad ako at kinuha ang gamit ko. I even looked

excited to be with him! Nakakahiya!

He opened his umbrella and held it for me. Pinagkasya namin sarili namin sa

payong na ‘yon hanggang sa makarating kami sa parking. We saw Engineer Lavin

and Engineer Castillo doing the same.

“Kaya pala ako pinapaalis!” Engineer Lavin shouted. “May chick siya sa loob,

pre?!”

“Ingat kayo, Engineer! Akala ko sa hotel ka ulit ngayong gabi?” Engineer

Castillo asked.

“Babalik din ako. Kukuha lang ako ng damit,” Sevi answered. “Sweet niyo. Bagay

kayo.”

“Ay, kayo rin,” Engineer Lavin laughed.

Sevi rolled his eyes before opening the door of his car for me. He raised a

middle finger on his friends before going inside the car, putting the umbrella

on the backseat. He started the engine and looked at me.

“Seatbelt,” he pointed out.

“Oh, sorry,” I awkwardly put my seatbelt on and looked in front again. “Uh,

thank you for.. being considerate.”

“Saan ka uuwi?” He asked.

“Wala ka naman mamaya so sa condo na lang,” I gave him a small smile.

Tumango siya at nag-drive na paalis. I felt a little cold and he noticed that

so he turned the aircon off. My head and body felt so heavy I dozed off to

sleep. Nagising lang ako nang huminto ang sasakyan sa parking. It was already

dark outside.

I unfastened my seatbelt before leaving the car. Sevi followed me from behind.

We didn’t talk to each other until we arrived inside the unit. He went

straight to get clothes inside his walk-in closet while I remained standing on

the kitchen, holding the countertop to support my weight.

I sighed heavily before going inside the bathroom. I took a hot shower but I

still felt cold. I brushed my teeth and went inside the bedroom to lie down. I

covered my body with a thick comforter. Hindi ko na binuksan ang aircon at

fan.

“Alis na ‘ko,” Sevi opened the door.

“Take care,” I said.

I heard the door close again. I closed my eyes after Sevi left.

I woke up around midnight. My body felt hot and heavy. Dahan-dahan akong umupo

sa kama at tumingin sa paligid. The lamp was on and the lights were off. I

held my head and sighed heavily.

I was about to go down the bed when the door suddenly opened. My eyes widened

when I saw Sevi wearing a jacket, holding a plastic. Mukhang galing siya sa

labas.

“I thought you.. left,” I blinked twice.

“Bumili ako ng gamot,” he went to me and sat on the bed. “Okay ka lang?”

:)

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“Nagluto ako. Kumain ka muna.”

Sevi went inside the bedroom again, placing the tray on the side table. I

carried myself up and leaned against the soft headboard, staring at him as he

tried to get the bowl of soup. I bit my lower lip to stop myself from smiling.

Hinipan niya muna ‘yung nasa kutsara bago dahan-dahang sinubo sa’kin. Nang

dumikit sa dila ko, agad napakunot ang noo ko at lumayo.

“It’s hot!” Reklamo ko.

“Shit, sorry,” he brought it back and tried to mix it again.

Kumuha ulit siya at hinipan-hipan hanggang sa lumamig. I couldn’t stop staring

at him, nangingiti pa sa itsura niya ngayon. He looked so serious.

“Oh,” he placed the spoon in front of my mouth. “Dali, matatapon.”

Nakalahati ko na ‘yung soup at malapit nang maubos nang mawalan ulit ako ng

gana. I shook my head as he tried to place the spoon in front of me again. He

glared and put it back on the small bowl.

“Ubusin mo ‘to,” he sounded mad.

“I’m sick. My appetite is not that-”

“Kahit na. Hindi ka na nga kumakain,” he sighed heavily. “Kaya ka

nagkakasakit, e.”

“Okay,” I whispered before nodding. “Akin na. I’ll finish it.”

He helped me finish it and then he stood up again, leaving the room with the

tray. After a few seconds, he went back, holding a glass of water and a

forehead thermometer. I pursed my lips as he tried to get my temperature.

“Nilalagnat ka,” he looked at it.

“I thought you’re going to stay in Batangas for a while?” Malumanay na tanong

ko.

“Change of plans,” he simply said while getting my medicine.

Pinainom niya ‘ko ng gamot at sinabing kalahatiin ko ang tubig sa baso so I

did. After that, he went out again. I was staring at the door the whole time,

waiting for him to come back. I realized that he still cared for me, even after everything that I did to him. Sevi wasn't the type to hold big grudges against someone he used to love, but I could feel that he was, maybe, a little mad because I promised not to see him again.

"Malamig ba?" Sevi entered the room again, holding a bowl, a towel, and a sweater this time.

"Kind of," I gave him a small smile. "My body feels hot, though. I don't understand."

He sat on my side and took the comforter off. He held my hand and placed it on his leg so he could wipe my arm with cold water, maybe to lower my body temperature. I hissed with the sudden contact. He did it with my other arm, then he washed it again to wipe my face. He leaned to get closer to me. I pursed my lips and stared at him.

"Why are you doing this?" I whispered, confused.

He didn't talk but he continued damping the towel on my cheek. His face was only inches away from me, I could feel his breathing. I looked away when he got up to wash the towel again. He went back to wipe my legs.

"Okay lang ba?" He asked permission.

“Uh, yeah,” I helped him pull my pajamas up to show my legs.

He wiped my back after wiping my legs. Then, he pulled the comforter up again

until my waist. He handed me his thick sweater and helped me put it on. I

wanted to cry when I smelled his familiar scent on it. It was so comforting.

“Huwag ka nang pumasok sa trabaho bukas,” he told me.

“I won’t,” I nodded. “But you can go back to Batangas. Y-you have work to do.

I’m going to be fine. I know how to take care of myself.”

“Hindi ako naniniwala sa’yo,” he shook his head. “Kung alam mo kung paano

alagaan sarili mo, hindi ka sana nagkasakit.”

“It’s because of the rain,” I defended myself.

He rolled his eyes before placing a Koolfever on my forehead. Nagulat pa ‘ko

dahil bigla na lang niyang nilagay doon. Parang hinampas niya lang ang noo ko.

“Akala mo ata salonpas ‘yang nilalagay mo,” I glared at him, touching my

forehead with my hand.

“Magpahinga ka na,” he stood up and turned the lights off again.

“Thank you,” I nodded.

He watched me lie down before leaving the room. I closed my eyes and forced

myself to sleep. I woke up so early in the morning, feeling sweaty. I held my

head as I tried to sit down. I reached for the glass of water and sipped on it

before leaving the room.

I stopped at the door when I heard Sevi’s voice, talking to someone on the

phone.

“Tawagan mo na lang ako kapag may kailangan kayo. May inaasikaso lang ako,” he

said while putting on a belt with one hand. “Pinapatawag ako ni Architect

Valeria. Baka roon muna kami sa site sa Rizal. May titignan lang.”

Naglakad ako palapit sa dining kung saan may breakfast nang nakahanda para

sa’kin. He turned to me and our eyes met. I stopped walking and gave him a

small smile. I looked so tiny with his oversized sweater and my pink pajamas.

His sweater was too big it was hiding my hands.

“You’re off to work?” I asked when I noticed his outfit.

He was wearing a pair of black jeans and a white button-down polo na short-

sleeved. Naka-tuck in ‘yun sa pantalon niya. He successfully buckled his belt

when he looked at me, still holding a phone on his ear.

“Bukas, baka makabalik na ‘ko dyan. Kapag umulan ulit, alam niyo na gagawin

niyo. Sige, salamat,” he said before ending the call. He turned to me to

answer my question. “Oo, may pupuntahan lang ako sa Rizal.”

“Oh, okay,” I sat on the chair and pulled the sleeves of his sweater up so I

could use my hands to get food.

My eyes widened when he suddenly put the back of his hand on my forehead. I

stiffened and stopped getting food to look at him. He pursed his lips before

placing the medicine on the table.

“Nilalagnat ka pa,” he pointed at the medicine. “Inumin mo ‘yan pagkatapos

mong kumain. Babalik akong lunch para masigurado kong kakain ka.”

“Oh no, you don’t need to go back here. I will eat. I can cook,” I panicked.

Nakaka-guilty na kailangan niya pang bumalik dito mula Rizal.

“Huwag na. Ako na bahala sa pagkain,” seryosong sabi niya habang nagsusuot ng

sapatos.

“Uh, okay,” I nodded like a kid. Pakiramdam ko talaga bata ako! Ganito ako

alagaan ni Mommy noon whenever I was sick!

He hung the strap of his bag on his shoulder before getting a roll of

blueprint. He checked his bag again to see if he left anything before getting his keys.

“Take care,” lumingon ako sa kanya bago siya lumabas ng pinto.

“Ikaw ang mag-‘take care’,” he replied before closing the door.

I giggled before finishing my food. I got no appetite but since he made an effort to cook me breakfast, I ate it. Uminom din ako ng gamot at niligpit ang pinagkainan ko. I took his sweater off so I could wash the dishes. After that, I sat on the couch and called Alice.

“Hey, Alice, I can’t go to work today. I’m sick. Cancel all my meetings for today. I believe dalawa lang naman ‘yun?” I looked at my iPad.

[Sure, Madam! How are you feeling? Are you okay?]

“I’m getting better,” I said. “I can work at home.”

[Nako, huwag muna, Madam! Magpahinga ka muna! Wala namang urgent na gawain today so take time to rest! Also, hinahanap ka po ni Sir Austin. Send him a message po or I can e-mail him.]

“I’ll just send him a message. Thank you, Alice. Call me if you need anything.

You can leave work early if you want,” I said.

[Okay lang po ako rito, Madam! Kayo po ang mag-rest! Do you want me to visit

you, Madam? Mag-isa ka lang po sa bahay niyo, e! I can bring food!]

“Uh, no, I’m.. I’m not alone,” I fake coughed. I felt awkward.

[Huh?] She sounded confused.

“Basta, I’m being taken care of. Thank you. I’m ending the call now,” paalam

ko bago pinatay ang tawag. She might ask more questions. I wouldn’t know how

to answer them.

Like I said, I messaged Austin so he would know why I was absent. Baka

isumbong ako kay Chairman, e! Not that I was scared, though.

To: Austin

Can’t go to work today. I’m sick. Sorry about yesterday, hindi ko na nasabing

sumabay ako kay Engineer Camero pauwi ng Manila.

He replied so fast.

From: Austin

It’s okay. I’ll go to your house after work. I will bring food and medicine.

My eyes widened. Why does everyone want to go to my house now?! Kung kailan

hindi ako roon nakatira?! They all thought I was alone and dying like my

father. Oh, it reminded me about the fact that ever since he got hospitalized,

I never went to visit. I stared at the wall, trying to think it over.

“No,” I shook my head.

I watched a movie on Netflix but just ended up sleeping on the couch. I woke

up around lunch time when I heard a doorbell. Tumayo kaagad ako at sumilip sa

peephole para tignan kung sino ang nasa labas. It was an unfamiliar man

holding a paper bag so I opened the door slightly.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Ah, pinapabigay po ni Engineer Camero,” he handed me the paper bag. “Pagkain

po ‘yan.”

My mouth formed an ‘o’ before getting the paper bag and placing it on the

countertop. Sumilip ulit ako sa labas nang hindi pa rin siya umalis.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Engineer Guzman p-po,” he showed me his I.D. “May pinapasabi pa po si Sir.”

Sir, huh. Boss niya si Sevi. He looked so innocent. He reminded me of Sevi

when he was still starting.

“Kasama na sa work mo ‘yung pagdeliver ng food?” I raised a brow.

“Ah, hindi po. May inaayos po kaming unit sa taas,” he scratched his head a

little. “Nag-volunteer po ako! Alam niyo na, pa-good shot! Girlfriend po ba

kayo ni Sir?”

“What? Oh, no,” I denied it so fast.

“E, bakit po kayo nasa condo niya?” His brows furrowed, confused.

“I’m.. I’m the.. Uh.. I’m the landlord,” I made up an excuse. “Anyway, ano pa

‘yung pinapasabi niya so you can go back to work na?”

“Ah, ang sabi po niya,” he took his phone out and read a text. “Sabihin mo sa

kanya, mag-send siya ng picture na ubos na ‘yung pagkain para masiguro kong

kumain na siya. Kapag tinapon niya ang pagkain, itatapon ko rin siya.”

“What? Kasama ‘yung sa dulo?!” I exclaimed.

“Hindi, Ma’am. Ako lang ‘yon. Joke lang,” he laughed. “Bye po.”

I chuckled and shook my head when the young man ran away. I closed the door

and placed the food on the table. I took them out and started eating. May

fruits sa isang container, and then may kanin at ulam. I bit my lower lip and

giggled, medyo kinikilig sa nangyayari.

“Hay, Engineer Camero,” I shook my head.

I tried my best to finish everything then I stood up and took a picture of it

so I could send it to Sevi. I sent a picture of the empty containers and then

a picture of me with my cheeks full with food so he would know that I was the

one who ate it.

From: Engineer Camero

Galing ng hamster.

My lips parted. Nag-init ang ulo ko hindi dahil sa lagnat kundi dahil sa inis

sa pang-iinsulto niya! My gosh! I punched the air a few times before calming

myself down. Gosh, I hate him.

Nag-shower na lang ako at nagsuot na lang ng black dolphin shorts and a white

shirt before getting another sweater from his cabinet. I forgot to put one on

my luggage so magnanakaw muna ako sa kanya. I sat on the couch after and

continued watching the movie I slept on earlier.

“Oh my gosh,” I wiped my tears. The movie was so heartbreaking! The dog died!

It reminded me of Jewel. “I didn’t know this would be the ending! This is so

unfair! Who’s your director, huh?! I will talk to him!”

I heard the door open. Nanlaki ang mga mata ko at sinubukang punasan lahat ng

luha pero huli na ang lahat. Sevi stopped walking when he saw me crying.

“Bakit ka umiiyak?” His brows furrowed. “May masakit ba sa’yo?”

“No, it was.. It was the mo-”

I stopped talking when he suddenly put his hand on my forehead again. Nakasuot

pa siya ng bag at may dala pang blueprint pero hindi na siya nag-abalang

ilapag ‘yon. I blinked twice when he moved his hand away.

“Bumaba na,” he said before going inside the study room to place his things.

Pagbalik niya, dala na niya ang thermometer. He placed it on my forehead

before looking at the temperature. He nodded and showed it to me.

“37.8 Kaunti na lang,” he placed the thermometer on the side. “Magluluto na

‘ko ng dinner.”

“What?! I just ate!” Reklamo ko. “Alam mo, you’re ruining my diet! I am on a

meal plan!”

“Meal plan pero hindi mo sinusunod,” he rolled his eyes before going to the

kitchen. “Huwag ka nang magreklamo. Kakain ka sa ayaw at sa hindi mo gusto.”

“What?” My brows furrowed. “Parehas lang ‘yon!”

“Oo. Wala kang choice,” seryosong sabi niya habang naghahanap ng pagkain sa

freezer.

“Hey, you are depriving me of my liberty! Susumbong kita sa kuya ko!” I

crossed my arms over my chest.

“Sige, sumbong mo ‘ko,” walang pakialam na sabi niya. “Para dalawang abugado

na ‘yung galit sa’kin.”

“What?” I asked, confused. “Dami mong kaaway! It’s because you’re so suplado!

Or baka sa’kin lang?!”

Hindi na niya ‘ko sinagot at nagluto na lang. I pouted and chose another movie

to watch while waiting for the food. I was halfway through the movie when Sevi

placed the food on the table.

“Kumain ka na,” he said, holding onto the table.

“Wait, I’ll just finish this movie,” I was staring at the television.

“Mamaya na ‘yan,” he sounded annoyed.

“It’s almost over!”

He went near the television to look at the movie I was watching. He crossed

his arms over his chest and glanced at me.

“Mamamatay ‘yan sa dulo,” he pointed at the woman. “Pati ‘yung anak niya.”

“What?!” Kinuha ko kaagad ang unan at binato sa kanya. “Kasi naman, e! Who the

hell asked you for spoilers?! Pa-epal ka, e, ‘no?! Ha?! You’re so annoying!

Wala namang nagtatanong sa-”

“Joke lang,” he raised a brow.

“Oh,” I fake coughed and shifted on my seat uncomfortably. “Sorry.”

“Kumain ka na,” he shook his head before turning his back on me.

I pouted before pausing the movie. I stood up and followed him to the dining.

He cooked tinola and it looked so delicious. I sat in front of him and got

myself food. Nakasandal lang siya at nagphophone, hinihintay akong matapos.

“I thought you don’t like it when people use their phones while eating,” I

said while pouring water on my glass.

He looked at me and raised a brow before putting his phone back on the table.

I smirked at him. Back to you, Engineer Camero! Hah!

We both looked at my phone when it started ringing. I stopped eating to look

at it. Austin was calling. Napatingin ako kay Sevi pero kumakain lang siya at

walang pakialam kaya sinagot ko na lang.

“Why? Is there a problem?” I answered.

[No, I’m in front of your house. Sabi ng butler mo wala ka raw dito. Where the

hell are you? I thought you’re sick? Bakit umaalis ka pa?] He sounded mad.

“Just go home, Austin. Don’t worry, I’m fine! I left the house a few days ago

because it felt.. lonely, o-okay?” I glanced at Sevi nervously. I didn’t want

him to know about it.

[Why? Dahil ba mag-isa ka? I can accompany you. I can move in!] Austin

suggested.

“You’re gonna move in?!” I choked on my food. I started coughing.

Sevi gave me my glass of water so I got it out of his hand. Naubos ko ang

tubig bago nilapag ang baso. Sevi continued eating like nothing happened. Sana

lang hindi siya nakikinig sa usapan namin.

[Yes, I can do that if you want?] Austin answered. [Are you okay?]

“Yes, I’m okay. I was just eating. Anyway, you don’t have to do that, really.

I’m.. I’m leaving the house!” I said impulsively.

Nasamid naman si Sevi sa sinabi ko. I bit my lower lip and stood up so I could

enter the bedroom. Ayokong marinig niya ang usapan namin. Nakakahiya.

[What? You’re leaving the house? At saan ka naman mag-stay? Do you want to

live in my condo? Malapit lang sa company. I have an extra room.]

“No! No, I have a condo na! I’m fine!” I convinced him.

[Saan nga? Can I see? Can I visit?] He asked.

“N-no, uhm, hindi pa siya tapos. Magulo pa. N-next time!” I was panicking.

“I’m eating, Austin! Bye!”

I sighed heavily after ending the call. Pagkabalik ko sa dining, tapos nang kumain si Sevi at nililigpit na ang plato niya. I stayed quiet until I finished my food. I placed my plate on his side and waited for him to finish washing the dishes so I could wash mine.

“Ako na maghuhugas,” seryosong sabi niya. “Magpahinga ka na.”

“I feel better now. I can wash-”

“Ako na,” he cut me off.

I pouted before walking away. Umupo ulit ako sa couch at pinagpatuloy ang movie. Pagkatapos ni Sevi maghugas, pumasok siya sa study room. Natapos ko na ang movie at nakapaglinis na ng katawan pero hindi pa rin siya lumalabas doon.

I placed my ear on the door when I heard his voice. He was talking to someone.

“Baka makabalik na ‘ko dyan bukas, Bianca,” he said. “Oo, medyo alanganin lang. Sinisimulan na nila ‘yung sa Rizal, e. Bukas nang gabi, baka dyan na ‘ko matulog.”

I bit my lower lip before walking inside the bedroom to sleep. I stared at the

ceiling for so long, trying to re-evaluate my decisions in life. I can stay here, right? He didn't say no. He also didn't say yes.. But this is also my condo! I paid for this, though he probably paid all the fees for 3 years. I have a right to stay here, but just to respect his space, maybe I should ask for permission.

Tumayo ako at naglakad papunta sa pinto. Bubuksan ko na sana pero biglang bumukas kaya nauntog ako.

"Aw!" I held my forehead.

"Shit, sorry," Sevi panicked. "Ano bang ginagawa mo dyan?"

"I was about to go out!" Hinampas ko siya saglit sa braso habang hinihimas ang noo ko. "Gosh, may scratch ba?! I would go nuts kapag may sugat!"

"Patingin nga," Sevi held my wrist and pulled it away from my face.

"Ikaw ang magbabayad ng derma ko if magka-scar ako sa noo!" I glared at him.

"Wala naman," binitawan niya 'ko.

"Anyway," I rolled my eyes and sat on the couch. "I wanted to ask you if I can stay here for the meantime. I mean, I paid over half of this condo so I think I have the right to stay here but of course, I respect you so I want to ask for your permission."

“May choice ba ‘ko?” He scoffed before getting his charger on the side table.

“Of course,” I crossed my arms over my chest. “I mean, hey, usually wala ako

the whole day since nasa work ako. You will only see me at night and then I’ll

leave na ulit early in the morning. Just think of me as a.. boarder.”

“Wala rin ako madalas. Ikaw bahala kung anong gusto mo,” he said before

leaving the room.

I stood up to follow him inside the study room. Lumingon siya sa’kin pagkaupo

sa swivel chair niya.

“You’re going to work?” I asked.

He pointed at his screen and raised a brow. I almost rolled my eyes when I saw

a gaming screen. Hindi pala siya magtatrabaho. Maglalaro pala! What the heck!

“Anyway, let’s do it this way. I can pay all the fees for this month-”

“Naka-advance payment ako,” he scoffed.

“Oh, okay, uhm, then I’ll pay you. For the groceries, you can take my food but

I can also take yours. Is that okay?” I negotiated.

“Kasama ba sa pwedeng kuhanin ‘yung damit?” He looked at my top and raised his

brows.

“Well, sorry, I felt cold,” I shrugged. “I can take it off! Wait!” I held the

hem of his sweater.

“Huwag na,” pinigilan niya ‘ko kaagad. “Isa pang rule. Bawal maghubad dito.”

“Oh, really?!” I exclaimed in disbelief. “You literally showed me your dick

the other ni-”

“Hindi ko sinasadya,” he said calmly.

“Okay,” I shrugged. “Also, walang pakialamanan, huh! No visitors unless may

permission! I don’t want everyone to know that we’re living together! I am

literally your boss right now because of the project. I don’t want to be in

the bad light.”

“Ikaw pa lugi,” he shook his head.

“Excuse me?” I raised a brow and crossed my arms over my chest. “Ako talaga!”

“May sakit ka nga,” he turned his back against me.

Sumimangot ako at lalabas na sana ng study room nang may maalala ako. I looked

at him again and took his headphones off.

“Ano?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“Who will sleep on the bed?” Nagtatakang tanong ko sa kanya.

“Ikaw na. Okay na ‘ko rito,” he pointed at his small bed inside the study room.

“Let’s take turns. Nakakaawa ka naman dito,” I glanced at the bed.

“Naawa ka pa,” he shook his head. “Sige, ikaw bahala. Pwede na ba ‘ko maglaro?”

“Okay,” I shrugged. “Sana stupid makuha mong mga kakampi.”

“Gamot mo,” he reminded me before I left the room.

I smiled by myself before taking my medicine. Bumalik na ‘ko sa kama at natulog. The next morning, I woke up early and noticed that Sevi left already.

Mas maaga pala siyang umaalis sa’kin. Maybe because malayo pa ang pupuntahan

niyang site. Now, I know.

I got myself a toasted bread for breakfast since hindi siya naghanda today. Limited edition lang ata ‘yung kahapon dahil may sakit ako. I laughed by myself.

I showered and brushed my teeth before walking inside the closet. I was wearing a white blouse partnered with a red checkered two-piece suit. I partnered it with black heels. I tied my hair in a half ponytail and put on some hair clips before placing my things inside my red handbag.

Since I left my car in the company parking yesterday, I just walked. Dumaan pa

‘ko sa coffee shop para sa iced shaken hibiscus tea ko bago nakarating sa

company. Alice immediately stood up when she saw me.

“Good morning, Madam! How are you feeling?” She asked.

“I’m fine. To my office, please.”

I sat on my swivel chair and listened to my schedule for today. It was packed

because I was absent yesterday so my meetings were re-scheduled today. I

nodded and sipped on my tea while reading some files.

“Miss Ledezma,” the Operations head entered my office nervously.

“What kind of report is this?” I placed the folder on my table and pointed at

it. “Parang gawa ng intern! Don’t you know how to proofread, Miss Chan?”

“I’m sorry, Ma’am,” kinuha niya ang folder at niyakap. “I will revise it and

send it to your e-mail within this day.”

“Give me a hard copy,” I sipped on my tea. “Hand it over before 3 PM.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” she bowed before leaving the room.

I attended 2 meetings in the morning and also visited the nearest hotel just

to randomly inspect. The hotel employees would always panic whenever they see

me. Para akong terror prof sa college, my gosh. Ganito pala ang feeling.

When I came back to my office, I placed my things on my desk and retouched my

makeup before proceeding to the board room with Alice. They called for an

emergency meeting. I entered the room and sat in front, gesturing them to take

their seats. All of us looked at Engineer Camero when he entered the room,

late again. He was wearing a maroon polo and a pair of black jeans.

“My apologies, Miss Ledezma. May problema lang sa site,” he said before taking

his seat.

“Start with the agenda, please,” I said, ignoring him.

They discussed the changes in schedule because of the unpredictable weather. I

listened carefully. The meeting wasn’t that formal and wala ring powerpoint.

Nag-uusap lang sila kung anong gagawin.

“We would like to add more workers to speed up the construction. We are

getting delayed because of the weather,” Engineer Camero said.

“It is, maybe, too early to say that we are delayed in our schedule,”

Architect Rosario answered. “Let us wait for two weeks before we make a

decision.”

“Snacks, everyone?” I said when Alice started distributing snacks. “Let’s take

a break to eat.”

“Madam, lunch mo,” she placed two containers in front of me. “Hindi ka pa kumakain.”

“Thank you,” I gave her a small smile.

Kinuha ko ang folder at ni-review ang budget at schedule namin. I got my ballpen and took notes, ignoring my food. My eyes widened when Sevi suddenly placed three paracetamol tablets beside my food. I looked around to see if anyone was watching.

Sevi didn’t say anything. He just went back to his seat and sipped on his water while texting. I jumped on my seat when my phone suddenly made a sound.

Sinilent ko kaagad ‘yon at sinilip sa ilalim ng table.

From: Engineer Camero

Kumain ka.

To: Engineer Camero

I’m full.

I saw how Sevi changed his facial expression when he read my text. He rolled his eyes before typing again.

From: Engineer Camero

Kakain ka o susubuan pa kita?

My eyes widened and looked around the room. Good thing everyone was too busy

with their own stuff. The side of my lips rose before typing my reply.

To: Engineer Camero

LOL. Try.

I was confident that he wouldn’t make a scene but my smile suddenly faded when

he stood up from his seat and he pulled a chair beside me. My eyes widened as

I panicked. Nilayo ko kaagad ang upuan ko.

“What the hell are you doing?” I kicked his leg under the table when he

started opening my food containers.

“Try, huh?” He raised a brow.

“I will eat! I will eat now for fuck’s sake. Go back to your seat!” I

whispered.

He stood up and pulled the chair back to its place before walking away like

nothing happened. He smiled at an employee and they talked about some

technical stuff. I sighed heavily and calmed myself before I started eating.

“Buti naman kumakain ka na, Madam,” Alice just got back from getting water.

“Yeah, binulungan ako ng demonyo,” I said sarcastically.

I rolled my eyes when I received another message. Sinamaan ko ng tingin si Sevi pero inirapan niya lang ako at nakipag-usap na ulit sa lalaking empleyado.

From: Engineer Camero

Ubusin mo ‘yan.

:)

29

“Why did you go to work today? You should have just stayed at home.”

I sighed heavily when Austin went inside my office again right after I came back from the emergency meeting. I was reading the revised report from the Operations head. Good thing it looked better now, bawas sa stress.

“I am fine now,” I said after giving him a glance just to acknowledge his presence.

“Where are you staying right now? Malapit lang ba? I just want to see if you’re doing okay,” he sat on my couch.

“I said I am fine. Ang kulit mo naman, e,” I massaged my head, getting annoyed now.

“Okay, geez,” he chuckled. “You want to have dinner together? My friend opened

his restaurant today. It’s an Italian restaurant.”

“Yeah, I’m actually craving for pasta,” I nodded. “Let me finish my work.”

It was around 6 PM when I decided to leave work and eat dinner with Austin.

Medyo malayo ‘yung restaurant so we had to take his car. Ihahatid niya na lang

ako pabalik sa parking para makuha ko ang kotse ko pagkatapos ng dinner.

“Austin! Wow, you really came!” His friend greeted us when we entered the

restaurant. “Who’s this lovely lady, huh?”

“Oh, this is Elyse,” Austin introduced me, putting his hand on my shoulder.

“Finally! Nagpakilala ka na ng girlfriend, Austin! Hello, Elyse! I’m Jon,” he

took my hand.

My brows furrowed. “What? I’m not-”

“Upo na kami,” Austin cut me off.

What the hell! Now his friend would think that Austin and I were really a

couple! Sumimangot ako at umupo sa tapat niya, getting more annoyed now. What

if mag-spread ‘yung rumor na kami?! I didn’t want that to happen. With Austin

pa?! No way.

“Why are you so mad? It wasn’t a big deal,” he shrugged.

“It is a big deal,” I rolled my eyes. “Because we’re not together! It’s a

lie!”

“It’s not a lie if it will happen in the future,” he chuckled.

“What the fuck are you saying? Stop it,” I scowled. “I’m serious. Don’t do

that again.”

“Let’s just order, Elyse,” he handed me the menu. “You know what I think?”

“What?” I raised a brow.

“You should have married me years ago,” he smirked. “We should have been

together. Hindi pa komplikado. I can also take care of you and love you like

what he did.”

“You know what I think?” I gave him a sweet smile. “You should go out with

other women. You seem lonely.”

“No, okay na ‘ko rito,” he laughed.

I rolled my eyes before pointing on the food that I wanted to order. It was a

simple dinner na may halong inis sa kanya dahil sa kakulitan niya. If only he

didn’t secure the company for me, I would have thrown him out of the damn

window. Baka naman naiirita ako kasi malapit na period ko? I guess.

Pagkauwi ko sa unit, I took a quick shower and went to the study room wearing

my pajamas. I worked until 10 PM but Sevi never came. I sighed heavily before

going to the bedroom to sleep. Salitan kami dapat dito pero hindi naman siya

rito uuwi kaya roon na ‘ko natulog. Maybe he was already staying in Batangas.

I was staring at my phone, thinking if I should text him just to ask if he

will go home tonight but I asked myself.. Why? Why should I text him?! Ako ang

nagsabing walang pakialamanan, right?

“Nevermind,” I hid my phone inside the drawer so I wouldn’t have the urge to

text him again.

I closed my eyes and tried my best to sleep. Nakakailang posisyon na ‘ko sa

kama at nakakailang tayo para uminom ng tubig, hindi pa rin ako makatulog. I

sat on my bed, frustrated. I stared at the drawer again for so long, thinking

if I should get my phone or not.

“Fuck, this is so annoying,” I shook my head and stood up to get some milk.

I already finished drinking a glass of milk but Sevi never came. I sighed

heavily and looked at the clock. It was already 2 AM for Pete’s sake! Bakit ba

hindi ako makatulog? Ano naman kung hindi siya uuwi rito, right?! Why would I

want to know?!

“Oh, damn,” I slapped myself lightly. “Go back to your senses, Elyse. Let’s go

to sleep. It’s not worth it.”

I closed my eyes again and forced myself to sleep. I woke up around 6 AM.

Damn, I barely even slept but I had no choice but to go to work. I felt lazy

to dress up today so I just wore a white pencil skirt and a pink long-sleeved

blouse with a ribbon in the middle. I put on a pair of pink heels and got my

red handbag out of the shelf. I tied my hair in a ponytail before leaving to

work.

I asked Alice for coffee as soon as I arrived in the office. Halata sa eyebags

kong wala akong tulog kahit sinubukan ko namang i-conceal. Nakakainis naman!

Sevi wasn’t even here but he was stressing me out.

“Alice!” I called.

“Madam!” She was already running inside my office after one call. “Yes,

Madam?!”

“I want to go to Batangas. What’s a good excuse?” Nagpahalumbaba ako.

“Uhm, beach?” She blinked twice. “Or.. bulalo?”

“That’s in Tagaytay,” my brows furrowed. “I want to visit the site but I can’t

say inspection because I literally just came there with Austin.”

I looked at my phone and scrolled through my messages. The side of my lips

rose up when I saw Engineer Lavin’s text a few days ago.

From: Engineer Lavin

Hello, Miss Ledezma. Engineer Lavin po. Save my number! :)

“Okay na, Alice. Thank you,” I giggled while typing a text.

To: Engineer Lavin

Good morning, Engineer. I have a few questions about the construction. Can we

meet to discuss it in person? Are you in Batangas right now?

From: Engineer Lavin

Yes, Ma’am. Pero bakit po ako at hindi si Engineer Camero?

To: Engineer Lavin

Oh, I heard he’s busy :) Ayaw mo ba? It’s okay.

From: Engineer Lavin

Hindi naman po! Sige, see you, Ma’am. Tanungin niyo na po ako sa lahat huwag

lang sa English. I doesn’t know how to spoken English, eh.

I laughed when I read his text.

To: Engineer Lavin

Alright. See you, Engineer!

I retouched my makeup quickly before getting my things, including my lunch

meal. Nilagay ko ‘yon sa paper bag at nag-drive na papuntang Batangas. I felt

so crazy and impulsive. Dumaan din akong drive thru para mabilhan ng pagkain

si Engineer Lavin so I would feel less guilty for disturbing him in his job.

It was around noon when I arrived at the site. Kinuha ko ang paper bag at

naglakad papunta sa may office. Only then did I realize that I made a wrong

decision for wearing a pair of damn heels! Nahirapan na naman akong maglakad!

“Miss Ledezma!” Engineer Lavin ran towards me to help me walk on the sand.

“Elyse na lang, please,” I gave him a small smile.

“Sige, Elyse! Sa office na lang tayo mag-usap. Ang init dito, e,” he smiled

and looked around. “Tsaka baka.. malaglagan ako ng bakal dito bigla. Mahirap

na.”

I didn’t get what he said so just shrugged it off. As soon as we entered the

office, I looked around just to make sure that there was no one inside and

also to check if Sevi’s bag was there on his desk.

“Nasa may site po si Engineer Camero,” Engineer Lavin chuckled when he saw me

staring at Sevi’s desk. “Mainit ang ulo niya. Nagagalit!”

“Where did he sleep last night?” I curiously asked because I remembered him

talking to Bianca the other night.

“Bakit may pakiramdam akong hindi talaga tungkol sa construction ang mga

itatanong sa’kin?” He playfully held his chin and looked up.

“Oh, no! I’m just curious!” I panicked. “I really have questions! Promise! I

have.. I have a list on my phone!”

“Sa hotel po siya natulog kagabi,” Engineer Lavin laughed. “Mag-isa. Ayaw niya

raw akong roommate dahil maingay daw ako at madaling-araw natutulog.”

“Oh,” I nodded. “Okay, so here are my questions-”

“Sus,” Engineer Lavin shook his head. “Huwag na, Miss Ledezma. I got you!

Kunwari na lang tinanong mo talaga ako kahit alam kong ginamit mo lang ako

para makapunta ka rito. Ouch, papi,” he held his chest.

“Hey, it’s not like that!” I defended myself.

“Gusto mo siya makita? Halika sa site!” He stood up and got another hard hat

for me.

Damn! Tumayo na lang ako at sinuot ang hard hat na bigay niya. I stalked him

from behind until we reached the site. Engineer Lavin was holding a blueprint.

He stopped walking so I could catch up to him.

“Eto, Ma’am,” he pointed at the blueprint. “Ang plano kasi rito.. Kunwari nag-

uusap tayo kasi nakatingin si Engineer Camero.”

“Oh,” I looked around consciously.

And there I saw Sevi wearing a white polo and a pair of maong pants. He was

also wearing a white hard hat and a pair of safety shoes. May kinakausap

siyang worker at mukhang tama ang sinabi ni Engineer Lavin. Mainit ang ulo

niya. He was pointing at something but stopped when he saw me.

I immediately looked away and pretended that I was listening to the bullshit

Engineer Lavin was saying. I crossed my arms over my chest when Engineer Lavin

walked again so I followed him from behind until I realized that we were

walking towards Engineer Camero. I was panicking on the inside but calm on the

outside.

“Engineer,” bati ni Engineer Lavin nang makalapit kami kay Sevi. “Ah, may

tinanong lang po si Miss Ledezma sa’kin kaya narito.”

“Hindi ko tinanong,” Sevi replied which made Engineer Lavin laugh.

“Kaso, Engineer, pinapatawag ako ni Engineer Ramos, e! Kayo na ho bahala dyan!

Bye!” My eyes widened when Engineer Lavin suddenly ran away, leaving me with

Sevi!

Oh my god, nilaglag ako! Iniwan niya ‘ko rito! Binilhan ko pa naman siya ng

food! My gosh!

“Sir, hindi pa po dumadating ‘yung dagdag materyales na kailangan ngayon para

sa itatayong.. Ano.. Hi Ma’am,” the worker smiled at me.

“Para sa itatayong ano?” Sevi’s brows furrowed. “Hi Ma’am?”

“Why are you so mad?” I raised my brow.

Sevi took his phone out to make a call, completely ignoring me. His brows were

still furrowed and his lips were pursed in annoyance.

“Oh, nasaan na? Wala pa rin daw dito. Ano ba ‘yan? Kahapon pa dapat ‘yan, ah?

Actually last week ko pa ‘yan hiningi diba?” I heard Sevi’s frustrated voice.

“Madedelay tayo nyan sa ginagawa niyo, e.”

I glared at him when he walked away to find a better reception. Naglakad-lakad

na lang ako at pinanood ang ginagawa ng workers. I covered my ears with my

hands when I heard loud noises from welders.

I yelped when I felt small stones falling on my head. Mabilis akong naglakad

paalis pero dahil sa heels, natisod pa ko at nadapa. I muttered a curse and

looked at my knee to see if I got a scratch.

“Ah, fuck,” I closed my eyes in frustration when I saw it bleeding. Mabuti na

lang at scrape lang. Hindi naman siguro siya magkakaroon ng scar.

“Ma’am, naku, okay lang po ba kayo?!” Some workers ran towards me.

“Nako, may sugat! Kukuha po ako ng tubig!”

“Alcohol, tanga!”

“Hindi, huhugasan muna ‘yan!”

“Ma’am, tayo po muna kayo!”

I was surrounded by men while I was on the floor. Everyone was panicking

because of my bleeding knee. It wasn’t even that serious. I just felt awkward

because I was wearing a skirt.

“Tapos na ba kayo sa ginagawa niyo?” I heard Sevi’s voice.

Everyone stopped when they heard Engineer Camero. They immediately dispersed

and went back to work, leaving me on the floor. What the hell!

I sighed heavily and looked at Sevi who was already standing in front of me.

He offered his hand and helped me stand up on my heels.

“Bakit ba kasi namamasyal ka rito sa site? Ano ‘to? Mall?” He sounded mad.

“I was just curious, okay?” I defended myself. “And Engineer Lavin brought me

here! He left me with you but you also left me! Where would I go, huh?!”

“Hindi kita iniwan. May tinawagan lang ako,” seryosong sabi niya.

He gestured me to follow him out of the site so I did. Nang makarating ulit

kami sa buhanginan, halos madapa-dapa ako. I winced when I almost fell on the

sand. Mabuti na lang napahawak ako sa braso ni Sevi.

“Sorry,” I gave him a smile before letting go of his arm.

Sevi stared at me for a moment before shaking his head. My eyes widened when

he knelt in front of me and helped me take off my heels. I bit my lower lip

and looked away, holding onto his shoulders for support.

Hawak-hawak na niya ang heels ko ngayon sa isang kamay habang naglalakad. I

followed him and walked with my bare foot until we reached his office. He

closed the door and gestured me to sit on his swivel chair.

When he came back, he was already holding a first-aid kit. I pursed my lips as

I watched him get a bottle of water to wash off the debris left on my knee. He

knelt in front of me and pulled my leg towards him so he could see it.

“Ouch,” I winced when he poured water on my knee.

“Heels pa,” he said before wiping it with a clean cloth and putting pressure

to stop the bleeding.

“Engineer Camero-” Bianca suddenly stopped when she saw us.

Sevi looked at her, his hand still on the cloth. Engineer Ramos stepped

backwards a bit, not knowing what to do.

“Bakit?” Sevi raised a brow.

“L-lunch,” Bianca smiled and slowly went inside, holding a paper bag.

“Busog pa ‘ko,” Sevi looked at my knee again before moving the cloth away.

“Ilalapag ko na lang dito kapag nagutom ka,” she placed the paper bag on the

small dining table. “Anong nangyari dyan, Engineer? Hello Miss Ledezma.”

“Wala, sugat lang,” Sevi answered while getting an ointment.

“Ako na dyan, Engineer!” Bianca volunteered. “Kailangan ka ata ni.. Engineer

Castillo!”

“Ako?” Sevi’s brows furrowed before checking his phone. “Wala namang text.

Ikaw na pumunta roon.”

“Nakasalubong ko siya!” Bianca said nervously.

I rolled my eyes when I realized that she was lying. She was too obvious. Buti

pa ‘ko, magaling magsinungaling.

“Mamaya na. Susunod ako,” Sevi said, already putting ointment on my knee.

“Okay,” Bianca nodded in disappointment before leaving the office.

I looked at Sevi again, wondering if he knew about Bianca’s feelings towards

him. Sobrang obvious! I was sure hindi siya ganoon ka-insensitive para hindi

mapansin. Maybe he was just ignoring it.

“Kumain ka ba?” Sevi stood up after putting a band aid on my knee.

“Uh, not yet,” I looked at my paper bag placed on the table, just beside my

handbag. “I was supposed to eat-”

I stopped talking when Sevi put his hand on my forehead again. I blinked twice

and looked at him in shock.

“Kapag ikaw nilagnat ka na naman,” seryosong sabi niya. “Kumain ka na rito.”

Umupo siya sa may dining table kung nasaan ang pagkain ko. I stood up and

pulled a chair to sit in front of him while he was getting my food out of the

paper bag. He placed them in front of me and opened the containers.

“Ikaw? Hindi ka pa kakain?” I asked in curiosity. “I have food here. I was

supposed to give this to Engineer Lavin but he left.”

“Kaya sa’kin mo ipapakain?” He raised a brow.

“Uh, yeah, sayang naman,” I placed the food in front of him. “But if you’re

full, I’ll just.. I’ll just give it to someone else.”

He rolled his eyes before getting the food. I bit my lower lip to stop a smile

when I saw him getting spoon and fork. Kakainin niya rin naman pala. We

started eating silently, not talking to each other. Mukhang wala siya sa mood

kanina pa.

“Uh, I forgot to bring my water container. Do you have an extra glass?” I

asked nervously.

He looked at me with no emotion in his eyes before sliding a black tumbler

over the table until it reached me. I gave him a small smile before opening the lid.

“Nainuman ko na ‘yan,” he said when I was about to drink through the opening.

“Uh,” I looked away. “Sorry. Are you LC?”

He stared at me for a moment before chuckling. I was looking at him like an innocent kid, wondering why it was funny for him. I was asking a genuine question!

“Ikaw ‘yung LC, diba?” He asked me back.

“Well,” I licked my lower lip a little, unable to talk.

I mean.. We already kissed.. But of course, I couldn’t say that.

“Sige na, uminom ka na,” he continued eating.

Uminom ako sa tumbler niya bago ko binalik sa kanya at pinagpatuloy ang pag-kain. He looked like he was forcing himself to eat. Maybe he was really full.

I laughed at his face so he glanced at me and raised a brow, wondering why I was laughing at him.

“Engineer Camero!” Engineer Lavin entered the office but stopped when he saw

us eating. “Wow, sarap! Miss Ledezma, diba may dala kang pagkain para sa’kin?”

“Oh, I..” I didn’t know what to say. I just gave it to Sevi! Hindi ko naman

alam na napansin niyang may dala akong pagkain kanina.

“Oh, lunch mo,” Sevi handed him Bianca’s paper bag. I almost choked on my

food.

“Ah, sige, master. Salamat!” Kinuha ni Engineer Lavin ang paper bag bago

binuksan ang pinto. “Hoy kayo! Wala raw munang papasok sa loob sabi ni

Engineer Camero!” We heard him say before closing the door.

“Tarantado,” Sevi whispered.

“What?” I asked.

“Watawat,” pambabara niya.

“Epal,” I rolled my eyes.

Niligpit niya ang pinagkainan niya pagkatapos kumain. Tumayo rin ako at

niligpit ‘yung sa akin. I placed the empty containers inside the paper bag and

bent down a little to get my bag. Sevi stood near his desk, holding the mouse

of his computer while browsing.

Sevi suddenly stopped typing something. I noticed him staring at my skirt so I

looked at him with my brows furrowed.

“What the hell are you looking at?” I hissed.

Sevi looked away, panicking a little. Kinuha niya ang jacket niya at naglakad

palapit sa’kin. He placed his jacket on the desk and leaned towards me to say

something but he couldn’t speak. I looked at him, confused.

“May.. dugo ka,” he scratched the bridge of his nose lightly, feeling awkward.

My eyes widened and tried to look back on my skirt to check.

“Fuck!” I used his jacket to cover my behind before running inside the

restroom. “Right. Today’s the day. Fuck.”

“May dala ka ba?” Sevi knocked on the door.

“Can you check my bag?!” I yelled inside.

I heard his footsteps and it went quiet for a moment. I jumped a little when

he knocked on the door again.

“Wala rito,” he said.

“Fuck,” I covered my face. “Can you.. ask.. someone for pads? M-maybe Engineer

Ramos has one? Or kapag wala, can you ask someone to buy-”

“Ako na,” he cut me off.

I heard the door close, a sign that he already went out. I covered my face in

embarrassment. Bakit ba ang daming nangyayari sa'kin ngayong araw?! I knew it.

It was such a bad idea to come here. Bakit ba kasi pinilit ko pa?!

Ako ba 'yung malas or si Sevi? I wonder.

I waited inside the restroom. Good thing no one was entering the office, just

like what Engineer Lavin instructed. I got my phone out to check the time. Ang

tagal ni Sevi. Saan ba 'yon nanghingi ng napkin?

I jumped on my seat when I heard a knock on the door.

"Eto na," I heard Sevi's voice.

I opened the door slightly, just enough for him to hand me the pads. I saw him

covering his eyes and looking away from me which made me chuckle.

"I have an extra underwear on my bag, I think? Can you get it for me?" I said

after getting a pack of napkin from him.

He left to check on my bag again. He handed it to me again, still looking

away. I laughed before closing the door. Bakit ang dami niyang binili? Isang

pack? Isa lang naman ang kailangan ko.

"Engineer Camero," I called again after putting on a new pair of underwear,

with a pad this time.

“Oh?” Sevi answered immediately. He was probably standing near the door.

“I have extra clothes inside my car. Nasa bag ko ‘yung susi. Can you get me a

pair of shorts? Unless you want me to go out wearing my undies?” I laughed it

off.

“Pucha,” I heard him whisper before walking away.

I waited again inside until he knocked and handed me a pair of maong shorts. I

put it on and flushed the toilet before opening the door. I saw Sevi leaning

on the wall near the door, waiting for me. He placed my heels on the floor so

I could put it on. I was just wearing a random pair of slippers inside the

bathroom.

“Thanks. I’m really sorry for the trouble,” I said after putting my heels on.

“Congrats,” he said.

“What?” My brows furrowed.

“Hindi ka buntis,” the side of his lips rose up.

I rolled my eyes before getting my things. My lips parted when I saw what

happened inside my bag! It looked like someone ransacked it! I glared at Sevi

but he just gave me a shrug.

“I told you countless times to be careful with my bag!” I yelled at him.

“Sapatos ko nga, binasa mo,” he shot back.

I made a face and rolled my eyes. I looked like a woman from boxing rounds

with my maong shorts and pink blouse partnered with heels. Kulang na lang ay

cardboard na may number.

“Aren’t you going home tonight?” I bit my lower lip and looked away.

“Kapag hindi, pupunta ka ulit dito?” He sat on his swivel chair.

“Hey, I didn’t come here for you. I came here for Engineer Lavin. Don’t be too

full of yourself,” I denied quickly.

“For what?” He tilted his head a little to the right, raising his brows.

“Questions about the construction,” pinanindigan ko ang excuse ko.

“Bakit siya?” His brows furrowed.

“Because you’re too busy and you might get annoyed with me,” I sat on the

couch and played with my fingers.

He didn’t answer. May kinuha lang siyang folder at binasa ‘yon. I stood up and

got my things so I could go home early before the sky turns dark. He didn’t

bother to glance at me when I opened the door.

Nakarating na ‘ko sa parking nang marealize kong wala sa bag ko ‘yung susi ng

kotse ko. Oh right, I gave my keys to him. I rolled my eyes and walked back

again to the office.

“Hey, I left my-” I stopped when I saw him unbuttoning his dress shirt.

I looked away when he glanced at me before taking his polo off through his

shoulders. Kumuha siya ng shirt at sinuot ulit, not taking his eyes off me,

waiting for me to say something. I closed the door again and leaned on it.

“Keys,” I blinked twice.

Kinuha niya ang susi ko sa desk niya bago naglakad palapit sa’kin. He stopped

in front of me and placed his hand on the door, directly beside my head. My

heart doubled in beat because of nervousness. He was standing so close to me.

“Mauuntog ka na naman dyan,” he whispered before getting my hand to place the

keys on it.

“Are you going home tonight?” I asked again because he didn’t answer.

“Hindi,” he said before going back to his desk.

I pursed my lips and opened the door again so I could leave. Naglakad na ulit

ako papuntang parking at nag-drive pabalik ng Manila. Gabi na nang makarating

ako sa company. Kinuha ko lang ang mga gamit ko tsaka ‘yung mga documents na

kailangan kong pirmahan and then umuwi na ‘ko sa condo.

The condo didn’t feel that empty compared to the big mansion, even though I

was alone. Maybe because of the smaller space and.. his familiar scent. I

placed my things in the study room before taking a warm shower. I put ointment

again on my knee after doing my skincare. Then, I laid down on the bed,

staring at my phone again.

I sighed heavily, shaking my head to fight the urge to send him a message. I

got up and poured milk on my glass. I sat on the dining chair and looked at

the clock. It was already 2 AM. Why couldn’t I go to sleep?

I went to the balcony and took a picture of the view to post it on my

Instagram story. I captioned it ‘2 am. city lights. loneliness.’

I went back to the dining room to drink my milk. I jumped on my seat when my

phone made a sound.

sevirous replied to your story

I clicked on it.

sevirous: Matulog ka na.

I bit my lower lip while typing my reply.

elydezma: I couldn’t sleep. Ikaw ang matulog na.

sevirous: Hindi rin ako inaantok.

elydezma: Why?

sevirous: Naglalakad ako, e.

elydezma: Oh, having a walk beside the beach? I’m jealous!

sevirous: Hindi.

I stood up when I heard a knock on the door, almost stumbling on the table. I

looked through the peephole but I saw no one so I opened the door.

“Oh my gosh,” I held my chest when Sevi suddenly appeared in front of me with

a bag over his shoulder. “Akala ko hindi ka uuwi?”

“Akala ko rin,” he sighed.

:)

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“Ano ‘yan? Dinner mo na ‘yan?”

I glanced at the glass of milk in front of me. Tinignan ‘yon ni Sevi na parang

galit siya roon. What did the milk do to him?! Pati ba naman gatas pag-iinitan

niya ng ulo?

“I usually don’t eat dinner na. It’s part of my diet,” I defended myself. “I

just couldn’t sleep so kumuha ako ng milk, hoping it would help me a little.”

“Healthy pa ba ‘yang diet na ‘yan?” He sounded mad.

“For me,” I answered proudly.

He opened the refrigerator to look for food. I pouted as I watched him take

some leftover food out. Hindi pa ata siya kumakain, ah? Gutom ba siya at

naglalabas siya ng food? I think so.

“I’ll just finish this and I’ll sleep na inside the study room. You can take

the bed. It’s your turn now,” I sipped on my glass of milk.

“Hindi,” he said while putting the food on the bowl.

“Anong hindi? It’s your turn now,” I placed the glass back on the table,

confused.

“Hindi ka pa matutulog. Sasabayan mo ‘ko kumain,” utos niya.

“E-excuse me?!” I scoffed. “Are you giving me commands? Are you my damn boss?”

He didn’t answer. He just turned the microwave on to heat the food. My brows

furrowed as I tried to finish my milk, still watching him. He leaned against

the countertop and crossed his arms over his chest while waiting for the food.

“Wala na, nainit ko na. Kung hindi mo kakainin, sayang,” he shrugged.

“Who told you to do that?!” Reklamo ko. “It’s almost 3 AM! Let’s just sleep! I

have work tomorrow!”

“Ako rin naman,” he said, shaking his head a little.

“Babalik kang Batangas? That’s far. Bakit umuwi ka pa?” I was worried for him

and his sleeping schedule.

“Hindi, may meeting kami para sa bagong project sa Rizal,” he said.

He placed the food on the table and got us some utensils so we could eat. It

was just chicken. Walang rice or anything. Gusto niya lang atang papakin

namin. I rolled my eyes and started to eat one piece. Sevi sat in front of me,

texting while eating.

“Ayoko na, I’m full na,” I said after eating one piece. “You finish that. I’m

already sleepy.”

“Sa kwarto ka na matulog,” he said, still busy texting.

“It’s your turn,” I said.

“Sa study room na ‘ko. May gagawin pa ‘kong trabaho,” he said in a monotone.

I just rolled my eyes and finished my milk before going inside the bathroom to

brush my teeth again. After that, I laid down on the bed and closed my eyes so

I could sleep. I dozed off to sleep so easily maybe because I knew I wasn't

alone anymore. Sevi was out there, working, though I couldn't see him.

"Hoy, Ledezma."

My brows furrowed when I heard Sevi, trying to wake me up. I faced the other

side to ignore him, still closing my eyes. Parang kakatulog ko lang tapos

gigisingin na ulit ako?!

"Gumising ka nga," he pushed my shoulder lightly.

"What the fuck, Engineer Camero, ang aga-aga," I placed a pillow on my face so

I wouldn't see the harsh light since he turned the lights on.

"Kanina pa tumutunog cellphone mo. Naiingayan ako," he sounded annoyed. "May

tumatawag sa 'yo. Alice pangalan."

"Shut up," I said, getting annoyed now. I was trying to sleep! "Just go away.

I'm trying to sleep."

"It's already 11 AM," he said.

Agad akong napaupo sa kama, gulo-gulo pa ang buhok ko at inaantok. I almost

fell on the bed when I tried to reach for my phone, which made Sevi laugh.

When I looked at the time, my facial expression changed.

“Fuck you, it’s 6 AM!” I threw a pillow at him.

“Sagutin mo ‘yan. Ang ingay,” he simply said before leaving the room.

“Ah! So annoying!” I pulled my hair in frustration before answering the phone.

“Alice, hey?”

[Good morning, Madam! I’m so sorry I called you at this hour. I just want to

inform you that I might be late this morning. Nasiraan ‘yung kotse ko!] She

said, panicking a little.

“Yeah, it’s fine, it’s fine,” I nodded with my eyes closed. I was still half-

asleep. “I might also be late. No problem. You should have just.. texted me,

though.”

[Ay, sorry, Madam! I thought urgent ‘to, e! Hehe, thank you po!]

I ended the call and went to the bathroom to wash my face. Pagkalabas ko ng

kwarto, nakasandal si Sevi sa countertop ng kusina at may kagat na toasted

bread habang nagtetext. He was wearing a pair of black jeans and a plain white

shirt, nakaangat pa nang kaunti sa may belt niya. He glanced at me and took

the bread out of his mouth when he saw me leaving the room.

“11 AM,” I scoffed. “Damn you.”

“You’re welcome, ah,” he said sarcastically. “May trabaho ka diba? Ginising ka

na nga, e.”

“Whatever!”

Padabog ko siyang tinulak paalis sa countertop para kuhanin ‘yung tinapay sa

likuran niya. He almost stumbled so he glared at me. I rolled my eyes and

opened the toaster so I could eat my breakfast.

“Init ng ulo, ah,” he commented.

“I only had 3 hours of sleep,” I was still glaring at him.

“Bakit galit ka sa ‘kin? Kasalanan ko ba kung bakit hindi ka makatulog?” He

raised a brow.

“Yes!” I looked at him.

My lips parted a little when I realized what I just said. He looked away,

pretending that he didn’t hear anything. Inubos niya na lang ang tinapay niya

at pumunta sa dining para roon kumain. I pursed my lips and inhaled a large

amount of air, calming myself.

“Alam ko na kung bakit ang sungit mo,” he said when I placed my plate on the

dining table.

“Shut up,” I said, remembering my period.

“Bloody hell,” he said in his fake British accent.

I glared at him and showed him my fist just to threaten him. He just smirked

and took a bite on his bread. I sat in front of him and reached for the

chocolate spread. I tried to open it but I just woke up so my hands were still

weak.

I looked at Sevi who was busy drinking on his water. He raised a brow when he

saw me staring at him. I gave him a cute smile before handing him the jar like

a kid.

“Can you open it, please?” I asked.

He placed the glass back on the table before getting the jar out of my hand

without saying anything. He opened it with no effort and then slid it over the

table until it reached me.

“Thanks!” I sounded like a kid.

Nang matapos siyang kumain, tumayo na siya at niligpit ang pinagkainan niya.

He washed the dishes before going inside the study room to get his things.

When he went out, he was already holding a black bag and a hard hat. He was

talking to someone on the phone.

“Ang labo talaga, e. Hindi talaga gigiba ‘yung nasa Cavite nang ganoon lang.

Ginagawa naman tayong tanga nyan, e,” he looked stressed out.

Gumiba? What? I suddenly stopped eating.

“Hindi mo sure, Ke,” he laughed. “Baka ilaglag ako dyan ni Attorney Martinez

kasi may galit siya sa ‘kin.”

“Are you going na?” I asked when he opened the door.

“Mamaya ka na nga,” I thought he said that to me so my eyes widened for a bit.

He ended the call and looked at me. “Alis na ‘ko.”

“Okay, take care,” I gave him a small smile.

I looked at my phone calendar when he left. Ilang weeks na lang pala, birthday

ko na. I was sure the company would throw a big party to celebrate my

birthday, though I just wanted a small gathering if possible. Actually, wala

naman akong balak i-celebrate siya since wala naman akong maiinvite na

friends.

Does Sevi know? Can I invite him? Or magiging awkward ba? Baka nga hindi niya

pa alam na malapit na birthday ko, e. I smiled sadly.

I wore a simple white dress to work, with a belt on my waist so it wouldn't look loose. Naroon na si Alice nang dumating ako. She was just late for fifteen minutes. Nauna pa rin talaga siya sa 'kin. She was the best secretary I ever had.

"Good morning, Madam!" She greeted, smiling.

"Office," I said before going inside.

She went through my schedule for the whole day. Half-day lang ako ngayon,

actually. Mamayang hapon, maglilibot lang ako sa branches namin. I just finished some paperwork the whole morning and then I ate my lunch.

I visited two hotels and also went back to our mansion to get some of my things before going home. Pagkabukas ko pa lang ng pinto, may nakaharang na. I

got irritated a little so I pushed it again but stopped when I heard Sevi's shout inside.

"Aray ko, ah!" Reklamo niya, nakahawak sa likod niya.

"Why are you there?!" I glared at him when I went inside the unit, pulling a luggage with me.

"Kakarating ko lang, diba? Nagtatanggal ako ng sapatos," he said sarcastically.

He was kneeling on one knee, trying to take off his shoes. Nilagpasan ko siya

at sinara ang pinto para dumiretso sa loob ng walk-in closet. I placed my bag

and shoes on the shelf. I also opened my luggage so I can organize my things.

Hindi pa ito lahat ng damit ko at may naiwan pa roon pero hindi ko naman

pwedeng dalhin lahat kaagad.

“Engineer Camero!” I shouted. “Get your ass here!”

“Ano?!” He opened the door and went inside, a little irritated by my shout.

“Can you put your things on your side, please? Wala na ‘kong space,” I pointed

at the shelves.

“Tatlo ang cabinet ko,” he pointed. “Tapos, sige, sa ‘yo na ‘yang natitira.

Okay na, ah?”

Wow, tatlo na ang shelf or cabinet niya. Mas marami na ang mga damit niya,

huh. Tumango na lang ako habang abala siya sa paglipat ng mga gamit niya. I

started placing my things, too, wondering how it would fit there.

“I can have the bathroom inside our bedroom. ‘Yung bathroom near the living

room ‘yung sa ‘yo,” I negotiated.

He nodded without saying anything. After placing my things inside the closet,

I went to the bathroom so I could also place my essentials. I took his things

out and transferred it to the other bathroom.

It was around 6 PM when he went to the kitchen to cook something while I was

cleaning the bedroom. Hindi ko alam kung pati ako kasama sa luto niya pero

kung hindi, oorder na lang ako. Nakalabas na ‘ko ng shower wearing my black

dolphin shorts and white shirt nang matapos siyang magluto.

“Kumain ka na,” he said, placing the food on the table.

“Thank you. I’ll wash the dishes,” I said, sitting in front of him.

“Kinain mo ba lunch mo?” He raised a brow while eating.

“Yes,” I nodded.

And we were filled again with silence. I had the urge to open a topic so we

could talk but also stopped myself. Okay nang awkward. Less talk, less

mistake.

He stood up and washed his plate, ignoring my offer. Sumimangot ako at

binilisan na rin ang kain ko para ako na ang maghugas doon. I placed my plate

on the side of the sink and pushed him a little using my body.

“I can wash the dishes,” I said, getting the plate out of his hand.

“Ako na,” he tried to get it again, his other hand holding a sponge.

“Just give it to me,” I started to get annoyed.

Kinuha ko ulit ang plato at tinaas nang kaunti para hindi niya makuha sa ‘kin.

He tried to get it but accidentally put soap bubbles on my eye so I winced and

closed my eyes.

“Aw,” I placed the plate back on the sink and held my eye.

“Shit, sorry,” he tried to wash it with his hand but his hand was also full of

soap so it got worse. “Sorry!”

I tried to open my other eye so I could put water on my eye, then I wiped it

using the hem of my shirt. He suddenly stopped when he saw what I did. I

opened my eyes again and saw him looking away.

“Oh, fuck,” I whispered when I realized that I just showed him my black bra.

“Sige, ikaw na maghugas,” he washed his hands before leaving me immediately.

I pursed my lips, feeling awkward now. After washing the dishes, I went inside

the bathroom to do my night care routine. Sa study room ako matutulog ngayon

kaya pumasok ako roon. Sevi was playing a game on his computer when I placed a

pillow and a blanket on the small bed beside him.

“I’ll sleep here,” I laid down on the bed and faced his side.

“Ikaw bahala,” he said, not taking his eyes off the screen.

I closed my eyes and faced the other side so I could sleep. Nakakatulog na ‘ko

pero nagigising ako bigla kapag naiinis siya sa kakampi niya.

“Bobo!” He said.

I opened my eyes a little and faced him so he could see that I was trying to

sleep. He glanced at me before fixing his headset. I closed my eyes again when

he turned silent. I heard some noises again so I opened my eyes and saw him

turning off the computer.

“Quit na nga ‘ko. Kayo na lang, pre,” I heard him whisper.

I closed my eyes again. I felt him covering my shoulders with a blanket before

turning off the lights and leaving the room.

I woke up around 5 A.M to go to the gym. Hindi ko alam kung gising si Sevi

pero hindi na lang ako pumasok sa kwarto. I was wearing a pair of black

leggings and a pink sports bra. I tied my hair in a ponytail and brought a

bottle of water before leaving the unit.

Pagkapasok ko sa gym sa may baba ng condo, naroon si Sevi, nakaupo at

nagsusuot ng gloves sa kamay. He was wearing a white shirt and a pair of black

atheltic shorts. I looked away before getting a mat.

Wala masyadong tao sa gym. I started stretching before getting on the

treadmill. Sevi was already on the lat pulldown machine to work on his back

muscles. I tried to stop staring at him so I wouldn't lose my pace on the

treadmill. Muntik pa 'kong mahulog.

After that, I did my routine. I did some butt workout using the gym equipment.

They said I changed a lot ever since I left the country. I got taller and also

became more fit because I had Ida as my gym and diet buddy.

"I think you should fix your posture a bit," a random guy placed his hand on

my back while I was on fours.

"What?" My brows furrowed and looked at him.

"Butt down," he placed his hand on my ass and pushed my butt a little.

"What the fuck?!" I had to go down the equipment so I could glare at him. "Why

the hell are you touching my ass?!"

“Hey, sorry, I was just trying to help,” he chuckled. “Anyway, I’m Jeric.

Ngayon lang kita nakita rito, ah.”

“Did I ask for your name?” I raised a brow, wiping my sweat with the towel.

“Feisty,” he smirked. “Just my type.”

I rolled my eyes and turned my back against him so I could leave but he

suddenly held my arm and pulled me towards him. My eyes widened when he was

forced to let go because Sevi pushed him on the chest with one hand, still

wearing gloves.

“Problema mo?” Sevi sounded mad.

“Whoa, whoa, dude,” the guy raised both of his hands. “I’m sorry! I didn’t

know, pare.”

“Fuck off!” I shouted at him, holding my butt where he touched me. “Manyak!”

“Hinawakan ka?” Sevi turned to me.

“Well,” I licked my lower lip a little, panicking. “He.. Uh.. Kind of-”

“Dude, easy!”

I covered my mouth when he suddenly grabbed the guy on the collar. He looked

at him like he was ready to kill him. The guy was trying so hard to get Sevi’s

hand away from him but the grip was too strong. Sevi's jaw moved aggressively

while staring at the guy so I had to go in between them.

"Hey, just let him go," I pulled Sevi's arm lightly.

"Listen to your girlfriend, pare," the guy said. "Hindi ko sinasadya. I'm

sorry."

"Sev," I called as a warning.

He suddenly let him go, which made the guy stumble until he fell on the floor.

Sevi shook his head before walking away to continue his workout. I bit my

lower lip and sat on the bench to calm myself down. That was so intense.

"Geez," I whispered to myself before cooling down. Ayoko na bigla ituloy ang

workout ko! I can just do it tomorrow if I have time. The atmosphere suddenly

became heavy.

Uminom muna ako ng tubig bago ko kinuha ang bag ko. I was about to leave but

stopped when Sevi placed his bag beside mine.

"Hintayin mo 'ko," he said in a monotone.

"O-okay," I sat on the bench to wait for him.

He did his cool down before we left the gym together. Walang nagsasalita sa

amin hanggang sa makarating kami sa unit. Dumiretso siya sa loob ng bathroom

so I did the same inside the bedroom. I took a cold shower and went out

wearing a pair of maong shorts and a grey tank top.

Sevi went out of the bathroom only wearing a towel on his waist. I shamelessly

surveyed his fine body but stopped when he looked at me. I pretended that I

was texting until he went inside the walk-in closet to put something on. Even

his back looked sexy. That was unfair.

“What am I thinking?” I whispered to myself.

I got up to check the fridge, trying to find something to cook. There was

almost nothing. I just sipped on a bottle of juice before getting my wallet,

keys, and phone. Sakto lumabas si Sevi sa kwarto wearing a pair of black sweat

shorts and white shirt.

“I’m going to buy some groceries. You want to come with me?” I asked, showing

my car keys.

“Ayoko,” he said before opening the fridge.

“Walang pang breakfast dyan,” I crossed my arms over my chest. “That’s why I’m

asking you to come with me. I can drop you off somewhere so you can buy

yourself breakfast.”

“Okay,” he sighed.

He followed me until we reached the parking lot. Hindi pa bukas ang grocery sa

baba ng condo so I had to go somewhere else just to waste some time. Sevi sat

on the shotgun seat, looking around my car.

“You want to connect your phone?” I pointed on the screen.

“Wow, alam mo na ‘yan,” he scoffed before turning the bluetooth on so he could

add his phone on the device list.

I started the engine and waited a bit before driving away. He connected his

phone and started playing some music. The songs were unfamiliar to me. Hindi

ko na lang pinansin.

Napansin kong kinakabahan pa rin siya dahil ako ang nagdadrive. He was

glancing on the sideview mirror from time-to-time.

“Can you open your Waze? I don’t know the way,” I said, my hands on the

steering wheel.

I told him where we were headed to. We arrived in front of a superstore. Sevi

followed me from behind until I told him to get us a cart. I showed the guard

my membership card before entering.

“Ang aga-aga, alak kaagad?” My brows furrowed when Sevi went straight to the

liquor section in front.

“Tinitignan ko lang,” Sevi defended himself.

I rolled my eyes before pushing the cart away. Inagaw din naman sa ‘kin ni

Sevi at siya na ang nagtulak habang naghahanap ako ng bibilhin. I put some

fruits and vegetables inside the cart, and then some ready-made salad bowls.

Sevi also bought some meat before pushing the cart away.

“Engineer Camero! Wow!”

My eyes widened when I saw Engineer Lavin in front of us. Sevi and I suddenly

stopped walking, hindi na makatakas sa mapang-asar na ngiti ng kaibigan niya.

I panicked a little.

“Ang cute naman. Parang mag-asawa lang,” Engineer Lavin laughed.

“W-we just saw each other h-here,” I tried to find an excuse.

“Ah, pero isa lang ‘yung cart?” He laughed before looking at Sevi. “Ayos ka

talaga, master! Ito pala ang libangan mo kapag Sunday! Kaya pala pass ka sa

inuman mamaya! Napakagaling mo!”

“He’s just helping me with my groceries,” I tried again.

“Weh?” Engineer Lavin wasn’t convinced. “Mamaya live-in na pala kayo, ah!”

“Ang ingay mo ‘no?” Sarkastikong sabi ni Sevi.

“Bakit hindi ka makakapunta sa inuman mamaya, Engineer? Gusto mo sa condo mo

na lang tayo uminom para makasama ka?” Engineer Lavin smiled.

“Busy nga ako,” Sevi faked a cough.

“Busy saan?! Baby time?” Engineer Lavin let out a teasing laugh.

Tinulak ni Sevi ang cart para sagasaan si Engineer Lavin kaya agad itong

tumabi, tumatawa pa rin. I gave him an apologetic smile before walking away.

Sevi bought some laundry detergent and other cleaning essentials. I was about

to pay for it but he was quick to give the cashier lady his credit card.

“Wow,” I whispered. “Sugar daddy.”

“Daddy lang, hindi sugar,” the side of his lips rose.

Natawa ako pero nawala rin nang makita kong kinilig ‘yung cashier lady sa

sinabi niya. That wasn’t even for her! I rolled my eyes and crossed my arms

over my chest, getting irritated.

“Speaking of, bakit wala ka pang anak?” I asked while helping him put our

groceries inside the compartment.

“Asawa nga wala, e,” seryosong sabi niya.

“Bakit wala pa?” I asked, getting more curious now. Not that I wanted him to

have a wife, of course.

“Mahirap,” he closed the door.

“Mahirap ‘yung?” I asked again.

“Mahirap mag-open ulit sa tao. Ikekwento ko na naman lahat. Sasabihin ko na

naman mga sikreto ko, mga paborito ko. Ipapakilala ko na naman sarili ko.

Parang back to zero. Nakakapagod lang,” he pushed his tongue on the insides of

his cheek, looking away.

“Oh,” I whispered, getting the idea.

“Parang cycle na lang. Kapag iniwan ako, ganoon ulit. Huwag na lang, diba?” He

looked at me before getting inside the car.

Natahimik tuloy ako habang nagdadrive. I felt guilty for leaving him, but I

didn’t actually regret it because I had to do it for myself. I had to bring

back my sanity. I wanted to make peace with myself. I wanted to rest and go

far away from everything that happened.

“Drive-thru tayo? Let’s buy breakfast,” I suggested while driving.

He just nodded, listening to music. Like what I said, dumaan kami sa drive-thru. I stopped the car in front of the little speaker where I could hear the crew.

“Good day, Ma’am or Sir! May I take your order, please?” The woman said.

I unconsciously looked back at Sevi. “Babe what’s-”

I stopped.

Sevi blinked twice, surprised and amused at the same time. I looked away and placed my arm over the window so I could say my order. When I looked back at Sevi, he was smirking at me, obviously teasing.

“W-what’s yours?” I stuttered.

“Pancakes,” he said.

“And two-piece pancakes, please,” sabi ko ulit sa may bintana. “That’s all.”

Nag-drive na ulit ako papunta sa counter para hintayin ang order namin. I was looking in front the whole time, gripping on the steering wheel tightly. Sevi put his elbow beside the window and played with his lips a little using his fingers, trying to stifle a chuckle.

“What’s funny?” I glared at him.

“Wala. Hindi naman ako tumatawa,” he defended himself.

I rolled my eyes before getting the paper bags from the woman. I gave the paper bags to Sevi so he could hold it for me while I was trying to get my wallet. Inabot ko na ‘yung bayad at nag-drive na paalis.

“Can you get my burger right there? I’m hungry,” I said while driving.

Sevi opened the paper bag to find my burger. Inalis niya nang kaunti ang wrapper bago inabot sa ‘kin. I stopped the car because of the red light.

I could see him smirking from my peripheral vision. “Eto na, babe.”

“Thank you, love-” I stopped and hit him lightly on his arm. “Stop it! Damn!”

I rolled my eyes when I heard him chuckle. Padabog kong kinuha ang burger sa

kamay niya at nag-drive na ulit. I was cursing myself inside my head. Parang

automatic na sa system ko na ganoon ang sabihin sa tagal naming magkasama. I

should refresh my brain! He knew about it kaya pinaglaruan niya ang utak ko!

He knew my mouth would slip.

“I’m sorry. Forget what I said, okay?” I said, frustrated. “I wasn’t

thinking.”

“Okay,” he shrugged, walang pakialam sa sinabi ko. He was just staring outside

the window.

When we arrived at the unit, I went straight to the bedroom to place my things

while he was fixing the groceries in the kitchen. After that, he stayed inside

the study room while I stayed in the living room to watch Netflix. Busog kami

pareho dahil sa breakfast so no one ate lunch.

I decided to do my laundry since may washing machine naman sa bathroom. I

gathered my dirty clothes and put it on the floor so I could split the colors.

I placed the colored ones inside the washing machine and added some powder

before pushing the button. It was already set.

I went out to clean the living room using the vacuum while waiting for my

clothes. When I heard the alarm, I went back to the bathroom to pick up my

clothes. My eyes widened when I saw an unfamiliar polo shirt inside. White

siya pero naging medyo blue na siya bigla.

“Oh no,” I covered my mouth when I saw the logo of Valeria company at the

side.

I stood up and went outside the bathroom, panicking a little. I knocked on the

study room before going inside, nervous.

“Uhm,” I couldn’t talk.

Sevi looked back at me. He was sketching something but he stopped when he saw

me inside. His gaze went down from my face to the shirt I was holding.

“I.. I didn’t.. notice that.. Uhm.. Your shirt.. Nasama siya sa laundry ko,” I

looked away.

“Akin ‘yan?” His brows furrowed.

“Yeah. You can’t recognize it anymore? Maybe because it was white a few hours

ago,” I laughed nervously.

“Ay, gago,” he whispered when he got the shirt out of my hand. “Hala,

kailangan ko ‘to bukas.”

“Really? Oh no,” I wanted to cry. “I’m sorry! I don’t know what to do! Should

I wash it again? M-maybe it will go back to white?”

“Hindi ‘yan babalik sa puti,” he shook his head a little. “Hayaan mo na.”

“I’m sorry,” I pouted.

He went back to his work, ignoring me. Galit ba siya? I bit my lower lip

before going back to the bathroom. I placed the rack near the balcony so I

could hang my clothes there. I felt so guilty I couldn’t look at him anymore.

My eyes widened when I heard a doorbell. Napatingin kaagad ako sa pinto at

dahan-dahang naglakad palapit para sumilip sa peephole.

“Oh my god,” I whispered before walking backwards, panicking.

I ran inside the study room and closed the door. Sevi looked at me again with

his brows furrowed because he had to stop working again.

“Y-your.. Your friends are outside,” I couldn’t talk.

“Sinong mga kaibigan?” He stood up.

“Engineer Lavin, Engineer Castillo, Bianca, and two unfamiliar faces,” I bit

my finger. “I don’t want them to know that we’re.. we’re living together for

heaven’s sake!”

“Sige, pumasok ka na sa kwarto,” he said.

I ran inside the bedroom and locked it, putting my ear on the door so I could

hear their conversation outside.

“Bakit kayo nandito?” Sevi asked.

“Inom, diba?! Tara na!” I heard Engineer Castillo’s voice inside, like they

already went through the hallway.

“Bakit, Engineer? May kasama ka ba?” I rolled my eyes when I heard Bianca.

“Wala,” Sevi answered casually.

“Wala?” Engineer Lavin asked again.

“Wala nga. Umalis na kayo. Susunod na lang ako sa inuman,” I could hear Sevi’s

frustrated voice.

“Shit, oy, tara na. Umalis na tayo!” Engineer Lavin suddenly changed his mind.

“Hoy, tara na! Lumayas na tayo rito!”

“Engineer Camero, bakit may panty at bra na nakasabit doon?” Another person

suddenly asked.

“Fuck,” I whispered, realizing that I forgot to take my clothes with me.

“Sa ‘kin ‘yan,” Sevi panicked.

I covered my mouth to stop myself from laughing. I knew it wasn’t the moment

to laugh but I couldn’t stop it. I imagined Sevi’s face.

“Kanino ‘yon, Engineer Camero?” Bianca sounded hurt.

“Umalis na kayo,” Sevi tried again. “May ginagawa ako.”

“Tara na kasi! Engineer Ramos, hoy!” Engineer Lavin called again. “Sa amin na

lang tayo mag-inuman!”

“Kanino ‘yon, Engineer Camero?” Bianca asked again.

“Sa asawa ko,” Sevi answered. “Okay na? Umalis na kayo. Ayaw niya ng bisita.”

:)

“Asawa?! Since when did I become your damn wife, huh?!”

I crossed my arms over my chest, raising my brow while Sevi was in front of

me, leaning against the countertop like a lost guilty puppy. He massaged the

bridge of his nose, getting frustrated and annoyed.

“Hindi ko alam sasabihin ko, okay?” He looked at me.

“Wala na bang iba?!” Reklamo ko ulit.

“Ano pala? Girlfriend? Alam nila na wala akong girlfriend dahil kakatanong

lang nila noong isang araw. Panty at bra mo nakasabit sa condo ko. Anong

sasabihin ko? Fuck buddy?” He argued.

“Okay na ‘yon kaysa asawa?!” I yelled at him.

“Kawawa naman reputasyon ko, ‘no. Conservative ako,” he playfully hugged

himself with his arms.

“Who would believe you?! Asawa? Wala ka ngang wedding ring!” I pointed at his

hand.

“E’di bibili!” He said like it was that easy.

I scoffed in disbelief. He looked like he didn’t really care where it was

going. Basta may ma-excuse lang siya at mapaalis ang co-workers niya. I pouted

and rolled my eyes. Bahala siya. Hindi naman nila ‘ko kilala! Sevi can do

whatever he wants.

“You should have just said girlfriend, you know? You won’t need any proof.

Kapag asawa, nasaan ang wedding pictures? Marriage contract? Wedding date?” I

raised a brow.

“Bakit ba apektado ka, hindi naman ikaw ‘yung gigisahin sa trabaho? Ako na

bahala. Babawiin ko na lang,” he rolled his eyes.

“What will you say?” Paghahamon ko.

“Fuck buddy,” the side of his lips rose.

“Oh, so your fuck buddy washes her clothes in your condo, huh?” I rolled my

eyes again before walking away.

“Ang dami mong reklamo, e’di sabihin ko na sa ex ko ‘yon. Okay na?” He

chuckled before going inside the study room.

Padabog akong humiga sa couch at nanood na lang sa Netflix niya. The Netflix

account was his, but it became ours when we were still together. Sa card niya

naka-connect ang bill, though.

Who’s watching?

Engineer | Sebastian | Vincent Â | Camero | Parasite Ex

I rolled my eyes again and clicked the ‘Parasite Ex’ profile. That was me, of course. He changed it just a few minutes ago! ‘Elyse’ naman ang nakalagay dati! I hate him so much.

“Immature,” I whispered while picking a movie to watch.

I watched until the sky went dark. I thought Sevi would leave because he promised his friends na susunod siya sa inuman but I guess he just bailed on them. What a man of word!

I was still glaring at him when he left the study room to find something to cook. He glanced at me and raised his brows, hinahamon ang tingin ko. Inismiran ko siya at binalik ang tingin sa screen para ipagpatuloy ang panonood. I heard him scoff sarcastically before closing the fridge.

“Ledezma, halika nga rito!” He called in the kitchen.

“What now?!” Inis na sabi ko.

I paused the movie before walking towards him. Tumaas ang kilay niya sa ‘kin

dahil padabog akong naglakad papunta sa kanya, nakasimangot pa rin.

“Ikaw ang magluto,” he pointed at the raw meat placed on the sink. “Ako na

lang palagi.”

“Duh! I usually don’t eat dinner! Ikaw lang ang nagpupumilit kumain! You’re

matakaw kasi!” I pushed his tummy lightly but stopped when I felt his muscles

there. I moved my hand away immediately.

“Ba’t hinahawakan mo abs ko?” He chuckled, placing his hand on his stomach.

“Ew,” I rolled my eyes. “Fine. I’ll cook, but go away. Leave! I can’t

concentrate!”

“Bakit? Minamanyak mo kasi ako,” he said proudly.

“You know, Engineer Camero, I think you’re sick,” I smiled sweetly. “First,

you referred to me as your wife and now you think minamanyak kita, huh? Maybe

you need more sleep.”

“Nakakahiya naman sa eyebags mo,” he pointed at my eyes. “‘Yang matang ‘yan,

kitang-kita ko nakatitig sa katawan ko kanina. Sabihin mong hindi?”

“Hindi,” I glared at him.

“Oh?” He took off his shirt.

My eyes widened when he suddenly walked closer to me. I stepped backwards and

leaned on the countertop just to stay far away from him. He placed both of his

hands on my sides and raised his brows on me, watching my reaction.

My lips parted, trying my best to not look below his face. He moved closer to

me until his lips were just inches away from mine. He looked down on my lips

before staring at my eyes again. I swallowed hard, unable to talk.

“Ano?” He whispered.

His biceps were flexed and his grip on the countertop was so tight I could see

his veins. I looked away and pushed him lightly on his chest. Come on, Elyse!

Go back to your senses!

“Piss off, dumbass,” taas-noong sabi ko sa kanya.

He chuckled before letting me go. He went inside the study room like nothing

happened, leaving me here, breathless. I inhaled a large amount of air and

held my chest to calm myself down. What the hell was that?!

I cooked porkchop because it was the easiest. I just waited for the rice

cooker to beep before placing the food on the table. I didn’t bother calling

Sevi inside the study room anymore. Kumain na lang ako nang wala siya bilang

ganti. I was about to finish my food when he went out of the room and saw me

eating.

“Wow, ah. Ayos,” he said sarcastically. His face screamed betrayal.

“You’re going to wash the dishes,” I smirked before standing up to place my

plate on the sink.

Hindi na siya nagreklamo. Pumasok na ‘ko sa bathroom para maligo. Pagkalabas

ko, kinuha ko na ‘yung mga sinampay ko at sinet-up ‘yung plantsa sa living

room while Sevi was washing the dishes.

Plinantsa ko na rin ang polo shirt niya. I was even having fun because I felt

so independent doing it until I noticed something. My eyes widened when it

left a burn on the sleeves.

“Hala, nasunog,” I covered my mouth a little, placing the iron on the side.

I muttered a curse before silently folding it, hiding the sleeves. I bit my

lower lip and turned the iron off before I slowly walked inside the study

room. I knocked on the door to get Sevi’s attention. He was looking at a 3D

model of a building.

He looked at me so I gave him a cute smile before slowly placing the neatly

folded shirt on his table. I made a peace sign before running away and locking

myself inside the bedroom. I closed my eyes and waited for his yell.

“Elyse!” I heard his frustrated shout from the study room like he was ready to

hunt me down.

“I’m sorry!” I wanted to cry inside the bedroom, standing beside the door. “I

didn’t adjust the heat! I didn’t know, okay?!”

He knocked on the door which made me jump. “Una, ginawa mong bughaw, tapos

ngayon sinamahan mo pa ng sunog. Ano ba? Galit ka ba sa ‘kin, ha?”

“Hindi ko sinasadya, promise!” I pouted, though he couldn’t see me. “I’m

sorry, okay? I’m sorry! I can pay for a new one!”

“Dios mio, por favor!” He hissed before walking away.

I sighed heavily when I heard the closing of the door. I slowly went outside

the bedroom to get my clothes. Hindi ko na naplantsa ‘yung iba pero bahala na.

Niligpit ko na lang at nilagay ko sa walk-in closet bago tumakbo ulit pabalik

sa kwarto.

After that, I did my night care routine, wearing my maroon nighties. I went

straight to the bed to have my beauty sleep.

I woke up around 6:30 AM when I heard my alarm. I turned it off and went

inside the bathroom to wash my face before leaving the bedroom. I was

expecting Sevi to be gone so I was surprised to see him leaving the bathroom,

wearing his uniform I messed up with partnered with a pair of maong pants. I

bit my lower lip when I saw the slight burn on the sleeves.

“Your uniform is.. Uhm.. Better in blue,” I gave him an awkward smile.

He rolled his eyes before getting his things, ready to leave the unit. I

pouted and whispered consoling words to myself while getting my yogurt inside

the fridge.

“I’m sorry na nga, e,” I whispered.

“Alis na ‘ko,” he said in a monotone.

“Take care! I’ll see you later!” I gave him a wide smile but he just closed

the door on me. Sumimangot ako at padabog na umupo sa couch.

I finished my yogurt before taking a shower and brushing my teeth. I was

wearing a sky blue two-piece suit with a white blouse inside partnered with my

silver heels and blue handbag. I tied my hair in a bun and put on a minimal

amount of makeup before leaving the unit.

“Alice, ‘yung perfume set ko?” I asked before entering the office.

“Eto na po, Madam!” She picked up a paper bag and handed it to me. “And also,

dumating na rin po ang dalawang limited-edition bag na inorder n’yo last

month!”

“Omg,” I smiled before getting another two boxes. “Thank you! To my office,

please!”

I placed the boxes on my desk. Inuna ko ang perfume set ko at binuksan para

tignan kung alin ang mabango. I listened to my schedule for today while

sniffing on the perfume. Pagkatapos, inispray ko sa left wrist ko ‘yung isa. I

waved it on the air before smelling it.

I sprayed the other one on my right wrist and then the other one near my arm,

I had to take my coat off. Hindi ko alam kung alin ang mas mabango.

“Alice!” I called again.

“Madam!” She was attentive.

“Can you smell these please? Ano ‘yung pinakamabango? I can’t tell the

difference,” I showed her my wrists.

Inamoy niya naman, pati ‘yung sa braso ko. She looked up, thinking. Maybe she

also got confused. It was hard to tell the difference.

“Oh my gosh, hindi kaya they scammed me?” I raised my brows.

“Ay, hindi naman, Madam! Mabango ‘tong nasa left side! Promise!” She pointed

at my right wrist. “Final answer!”

“Okay, thanks,” I went back to my seat and tried to smell it again.

I read some documents before signing it, then I attended a meeting with a

business partner. After that, dumiretso na ‘ko sa board room para sa isa pang

meeting with the managers. About lang sa resort in Batangas.

I entered the room, holding two food containers because I forgot to eat my

lunch on time. I saw Sevi in his Valeria uniform, talking with the Operations

head. Hindi naman halatang sunog ang sleeves niya, ah! I pouted before

gesturing them to sit down.

We started with the agenda. I tried to listen carefully but I was still

bothered by the smell of the perfume. Inamoy ko ulit ang wrists ko bago

binalik ang atensyon sa projector screen. Some employees were already looking

at me, getting weirded out because I kept on smelling my wrists.

They just discussed the adjustments. They added more workers to speed up the

construction and also adjusted the budget and calendar. I was just nodding all

along, until Alice went inside to give snacks.

“Let’s take a break. I need to eat,” I announced.

Parang lumabas bigla ang teacher sa classroom dahil umingay bigla sa loob at

may mga nagsitayuan pa para lumipat ng upuan. I stood up and walked towards

the other side of the room to get myself a glass of water while everyone was

busy discussing something.

“Engineer, anong nangyari sa uniform mo?” I heard an employee from Valeria.

“Ah, wala, nasunog e,” Sevi showed them the sleeves. “Hayaan n’yo na.”

“Nakakatawa naman, Engineer. Sino bang namalantsa nyan? Hindi ka naman

ganyan,” a guy laughed.

“Oo nga, e. Sino ba?” Sevi suddenly glared at me.

I looked away and sipped on my glass of water. Nakakainis naman siya! Hindi ko

naman sinasadya, e!

I was about to leave when Sevi suddenly appeared on my side to get water.

Sumimangot ako at humarap saglit sa kanya para panoorin siyang kumuha ng

tubig. I placed my elbow on the pantry shelf, glaring at him the whole time.

“I have a question,” I said.

“Ano?” He asked without looking at me.

“Can you smell my wrists, please?” I took my coat off so he can also smell the

other one on my arm.

“Ano ba ‘yan?” His brows furrowed as he placed his tumbler back on the table.

“Kanina pa ‘yan, ah. Kanina mo pa ‘yan inaamoy-amoy.”

“Oh, you saw?” I giggled. “I bought a perfume set but I couldn’t tell the

difference. Try mo nga.”

I showed him my wrists. He sighed before holding my left wrist to sniff on it.

Then, the other side. His brows furrowed, trying to think.

“Here! May isa pa,” I pointed on the spot near my elbow.

“Ano ba ‘yan,” reklamo niya pero hinawakan niya rin ang braso ko para amuyin.

“U-uhm, Miss Ledezma, Engineer Camero,” Alice called.

Sabay kaming tumingin sa kanya. My eyes widened when I realized that almost

everyone in the room was already looking at us. We looked so weird! He was

holding my arm and smelling it! What the heck!

Umayos kaagad ako ng tayo at lumayo kay Sevi. I looked away and got my glass

of water, pretending that nothing happened.

“Let’s continue, please,” I walked back to my seat.

I had no choice but to eat during the meeting. My face heated from

embarrassment. Nakakahiya, ano ba ‘yon?! I didn’t notice how the room went

silent because of us. Baka kung ano na ang isipin nila ngayon!

After the meeting, I couldn’t look at Sevi anymore. Tuloy-tuloy lang akong

lumabas ng board room pero napahinto rin nang makasalubong si Austin.

“I was waiting for you,” he said and held my arm.

“Why?” I stepped sideways so I wouldn’t block the door. “You should have just

waited inside my office.”

“Do you want to have dinner together? I know a nice restaurant,” he gave me a

smile. “My treat!”

“Oh, damn,” I looked at my phone to check the date. “It’s your birthday,

right?!”

“Yeah,” he smiled shyly and scratched his head a little. “I thought you

forgot.”

“Yeah, sure,” I nodded.

I looked away from him when Sevi passed by. He was holding a folder on his

hand while talking to another guy. Sumulyap siya sa ‘kin saglit pero umiwas

din ng tingin at naglakad na paalis. I gave Austin a pat on the shoulder

before walking back to my office.

It was around 6 PM when Austin and I left the office to have a nice dinner at

the nearest restaurant with his dad. We were talking about business while

eating. Wala na kaming ibang pag-uusapan, e.

“If only your dad agreed to the marriage between you and Austin, both of you

would have been married right now with two kids,” his dad chuckled.

I felt awkward so I just gave him a smile. “You think so, Tito?”

“Of course. You would make a great couple. Hindi ka pa ba pinopormahan ni

Austin?” His brows furrowed.

“We’re just friends,” I sipped on my wine.

“What a slow man, Austin. Are you really my son?” His dad let out a laugh.

“I’m taking it slow,” Austin smiled at his dad. “I don’t want Elyse to feel

overwhelmed.”

My brows furrowed while eating, not liking where the conversation was headed

to. I had no plans on marrying Austin, or even liking him back. Wala sa isip

ko ang mga ganoong bagay. I wanted to stay single for now.

“I can grow old single, Tito,” I chuckled. “No plans on marriage yet.”

“What? You can’t be single forever, Elyse,” he shook his head. “The company

would need an heir or heiress.”

“I’m still young,” I said, getting uncomfortable now. “And of course I can

stay single forever. A woman is not made to be a slave of love.”

“Dad, just stop it. Let’s just eat,” Austin said to cut the conversation.

I stayed quiet until we finished eating. Tito Anthony had to go home early so

naiwan ako kay Austin. He asked if we could have a few drinks since the night

was still young. I agreed. Mukhang kailangan ko nga munang mag-relax.

I took my car and just followed him to a high-end bar around the place. It

wasn’t like a club where the sound was too loud you couldn’t talk to your

friends. This was something chill. May music pero hindi gaanong malakas. There

were tables but we chose to sit on the counter. I could see some familiar

faces. Mga businessman and politicians.

“Margarita,” I told the bartender.

“I’m sorry about my dad. He was itching to have a grandchild,” he chuckled.

“Yeah, it’s fine,” I gave him a small smile.

I already had 3 cocktails and 6 shots of tequila when a random guy approached

me. He sat beside me and offered me a drink while Austin was in the restroom.

I smiled at him, obviously drunk.

“You like me, don’t you?” I pointed at his face.

“You’re wasted, Elyse,” the guy laughed.

I blinked twice until my vision went clearer. My eyes widened when I saw

Hiro’s brother in front of me. Umayos kaagad ako ng upo dahil sa hiya.

“Sorry, I didn’t recognize you, Haze,” I chuckled awkwardly. “I’m so drunk,

damn.”

“Here,” he slid a glass of water. It was the drink he was offering earlier. It

was just water. “You need to go-”

“Oh my god, Austin!” I yelled when he suddenly grabbed Haze’s collar.

Bumaba ako sa upuan ko at muntik pang malaglag dahil sa kalasingan. I tried to

go in between them but Austin wouldn’t let go of him. Haze was just looking at

him calmly with a smirk plastered on his face.

“Get the fuck out of my face, kiddo,” Haze chuckled.

“Austin! Let’s go home!” I pulled him away, getting my bag. I still felt so dizzy and my vision was a little blurry but I tried my best to walk straight just to drag him out of the bar.

“Kiddo?! Fuck you, man!” Austin yelled in the parking lot, kicking a stone.

“Why the hell would you do that?!” I yelled. “Fuck, my head is spinning.” I leaned on my car and held my head. I looked at the time. It was almost midnight! Ang tagal ko palang umiinom doon. Kailangan ko nang umuwi.

“Do you like that guy?!” Austin held my arm.

“What?! No!” I pushed him away lightly. “Why the hell do you care so much?! Haze was a friend of my brother!”

“Why do I care so much? Hindi ba sinabi ko na sa ‘yo noon na gusto kita?!” He was still shouting. It was making my head hurt. “You were flirting with him!”

“I wasn’t flirting with him! What the fuck are you on?!” I held my head again and looked down on my phone when I saw it ringing.

“If you want to flirt, just flirt with me for fuck’s sake! Ano pa bang hinihintay mo?” Austin scoffed.

“I’m going to take this call,” I turned my back against him.

[Nasaan ka?] I heard Sevi’s voice.

“I’m in Exclusive,” I answered.

“Elyse, you like me, right?” Austin tried to take my phone away.

“You’re drunk,” I shook my head and put my phone inside my bag so he wouldn’t

get his hand on it. “You need to go home. Call your driver. You’re making my

head hurt. Damn.”

I closed my eyes and massaged my head, hoping the spinning would stop. I heard

Austin kicking some rocks so I opened my eyes again. He looked back at me and

held my wrist to pull me closer to him.

“What?” I asked, getting weak now.

“You like me, right?” He asked again, desperate.

“You’re my friend,” I nodded.

I tried to push him away when he hugged me tightly. He was whispering

something to me but I was too drunk to understand. I heard the words ‘love’,

‘marry’, ‘like’, and other bullshit. I put my hand on his chest to push him

away again.

“Let me go!” I successfully got away from his embrace. I glared at him and

took my car keys out so I could leave.

I realized that I couldn’t drive so I went back and got Austin’s phone out of his pocket so I could call his driver. I still didn’t want him to end up in an accident. After that, I sat on the hood of my car, waiting for his driver.

Austin was sitting on the floor, holding his head in frustration.

“Hey, nandyan na driver mo,” I kicked him a little so he would get up.

He stood up and looked at their car before walking towards me. My eyes widened

when he put his hands on my side, cornering me.

“A birthday kiss,” he whispered. “Kahit ‘yun lang, Eli..”

“You’re just drunk,” I pushed him away. “Go home.”

“Please, please!” He shouted and held my face forcefully.

“Austin, what the hell-” I stopped talking when he suddenly gave me a hug instead of a kiss. “Hey, what are you doing?”

“Give me a chance,” he whispered, crying.

“W-what?” I stuttered.

“A chance, Elyse.. Just a chance to prove myself to you. Please,” he begged.

“I like you so much. You know that already, right?”

“Austin, I’m sorry but..”

I immediately pushed him away when I saw Sevi leaning on his car, watching us.

He looked at me with no emotion in his eyes. I panicked and left Austin so I

could go to him. He just gestured me to go inside his car without saying anything.

Umupo ako sa shotgun seat at tumingin kay Austin na inaalalayan na ng driver niya papasok ng sasakyan. I looked at my car. I'll just ask Kuya Roel to get it. I couldn't drive right now.

Sevi was quiet the whole ride. I bit my lower lip, trying to find a topic so we could talk. I adjusted the aircon and shifted on my seat uncomfortably.

Sevi didn't bother to give me a single glance. His eyes were in front and his brows were furrowed a bit. His grip on the steering wheel was so tight I could see his veins.

"I didn't notice that you called me thrice," I said, giving him an awkward smile.

He did not talk. He just gave me a nod.

"Do you have water? I need to sober up," I asked.

He pointed at the bottle of water placed in between us. Kinuha ko 'yon at kinalahati bago binalik sa lagayan. I inhaled a large amount of air and looked around, making little noises so it wouldn't be too quiet inside the car.

"It was Austin's birthday," I told him.

“Oh, tapos?” He raised a brow.

Nagsalita nga, pambabara rin naman. Sumimangot ako at umayos ulit ng upo,

hindi makasandal dahil hindi mapakali sa katahimikan niya. Galit ba siya? What

did I do to him?

“W-we had dinner with his dad and then we went out for drinks. I also saw

Hiro’s brother! Have you met him?” I asked again.

He just shook his head.

“Right, you’re not close. Uhmm,” I played with my hands. “Thanks for picking

me up. I was about to book grab. Good thing you know that bar? Malapit lang

kasi sa condo, right?”

He didn’t answer so I pouted and sighed heavily.

“Are you mad at me?” My brows furrowed.

“Hindi,” maikling sagot niya.

“Okay,” I nodded and smiled like a kid. “That’s good. I thought you’re mad at

me. Phew..”

Dahil malapit lang ang bar sa condo, nakarating na rin kaagad kami sa parking.

Nauna na siyang lumabas ng elevator at nagbukas ng pinto ng unit. I stalked

him from behind, trying to walk straight. I was already a little sober so I had the strength to take a shower and brush my teeth. I wore a black night dress and put on my silk robe before getting out of the room to get myself a glass of water.

Sevi entered the bedroom and closed it loudly it made me jump a little. Right, it was already his turn sa bedroom. I held my chest and finished a glass of water before going inside the bedroom to get my pillow.

I saw Sevi sitting at the edge of the bed, texting. I slowly walked towards him and bent down to get my pillow and blanket. Ang lapit ko na sa kanya pero hindi niya 'ko tinignan kahit isang beses lang.

"Dito ka na matulog," he said without looking at me.

"What? No, I'm fine. It's your turn. I can sleep in the study-" I stopped talking when he stood up and left the room.

I blinked twice before placing the pillow and blanket back on the bed. I tiptoed my way out of the room to look for him. I saw him enter the study room so I followed him and opened it slightly, just enough to peek.

I saw him sitting on his swivel chair, looking at the screen. He was working.

He had a pencil on his hand and an empty paper.

I went back to the room to bring my pillow and my blanket before entering the

study room. He looked at me with his brows furrowed when I placed the pillow

on the mini-bed beside him.

“I’ll sleep here,” I sat on the bed and gave him a cute smile.

He nodded and suddenly turned the monitor off. He stood up and left the room,

taking his pencil and paper with him. My lips parted in shock. What the hell

did I do to him?! Why was he being weird?!

Kinuha ko ulit ang unan at kumot at pumasok sa bedroom. He was there, sitting

on the couch, sketching something on the coffee table. Nang makita akong

papasok, tumayo ulit siya at aalis na sana pero sinara ko ang pinto at

humarang doon.

“You’re mad at me,” I concluded.

“Alis dyan,” he said calmly, holding the door knob.

“No,” I shook my head. “You’re acting so weird. Why are you giving me a silent

treatment? You’re really mad at me.”

“May trabaho pa ‘ko, Amora,” seryosong sabi niya.

“Amora,” I scoffed. “Why are you calling me by my first name now, Sebastian?”

I emphasized.

“Lasing ka lang,” he pulled the door knob so I was forced to step aside.

Sumimangot ulit ako at sumunod sa kanya palabas ng kwarto. Pumunta siya sa

living room at doon nilagay ang papel na hawak niya. I pouted and sat beside

him.

“Bakit ba sunod ka nang sunod?” He asked, getting annoyed.

“You’re mad at me,” sabi ko ulit.

“Hindi nga ako galit,” he hissed.

“Then why are you saying it that way?” Reklamo ko sa kanya.

“Ah, paano ba dapat?” He faced me. “Elyse, hindi ako galit sa ‘yo. Sana

makatulog ka nang maayos. Sana masarap ang ulam mo bukas at sana hindi mauntog

hinliliit mo sa gilid ng lamesa habang-buhay,” he exaggerated.

“You’re being sarcastic now!” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Anak ng pating,” he whispered, massaging his head.

“Just admit that you’re mad at me, okay?!” I stood up and raised a brow. “Now

I’m completely sober because of your attitude!”

He shook his head and ignored me. He pretended that he was sketching something

but he was just shading his pencil like a damn kid. I sighed heavily and pulled my hair in frustration. He was stressing me out.

“Are you jealous?” I tilted my head a little to the right.

Binitawan niya bigla ang lapis niya at inangat ang tingin sa ‘kin.

“Ako?” He scoffed.

“Why? Are you seeing someone else here?” I replied sarcastically.

“Bakit ako magseselos doon? Ang pangit pangit noon,” he rolled his eyes.

“What?” I can’t help but let out a chuckle. He sounded like a kid. “So kapag gwapo, magseselos ka? Right? That’s what you’re saying right now?”

“Kaka-inom mo ‘yan,” he shook his head and stood up to walk away again.

“He was asking me to give him a chance,” I said, which made him stop walking.

“Should I give him a chance?”

“Gawin mo ang gusto mo, Elyse. Wala akong pakialam,” he swallowed hard.

I turned to him and raised a brow. “You think so?”

“Oo naman. Bagay kayo,” he gave me a small smile before walking away.

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“Elyse, about what happened last night..”

I continued browsing on my laptop, trying to find something to order online. I

was thinking of a makeup set. My favorite makeup artist just launched his own

brand. I wanted to check if it was worth it.

“Elyse, will you talk to me, please?” Austin sighed, obviously guilty.

“I don’t have anything to say to you,” I did not give him a single glance.

“I’m so sorry,” Austin looked down, his hands inside his pocket. “I know being

drunk is not an excuse. I was out of my mind. I shouldn’t have touched you,

tried to kiss you, or hugged you. I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted,” I nodded. “Now, can you leave?”

“He picked you up,” he looked at me. “Engineer Camero, your ex. I remember him

picking you up. Are you back together?”

“No,” I rolled my eyes and leaned on my chair. “He picked me up because I

couldn’t drive, and it’s none of your business anymore.”

“He’s not good for you, Eli,” he looked worried.

“No one is,” I whispered, biting my finger a bit.

“I’m serious about you giving me a chance. I will do everything to have that chance, Elyse,” he gave me a small smile. “I’m sorry for touching you and causing trouble but I’m not sorry for asking you to give me a chance so I could prove that I am better than him.”

“No one is better than anyone,” I rolled my eyes, getting irritated. “Why do men like competing with other men? Is that your ego talking for you?”

“I am just saying that he doesn’t deserve you. He already caused you too much

pain-”

“That’s enough,” I glared at him. “Let’s not go there.”

“Right,” he nodded in defeat before slowly leaving my office.

I sighed heavily after checking out my online cart. I bought a makeup set and

had it delivered in the condo. I’ll just give a letter to the lobby. I played with my lips and zoned out a little, remembering what Sevi said about me giving Austin a chance.

“Coward,” I whispered, shaking my head.

Sevi left so early so we didn’t have the chance to talk about it. Not that I was expecting him to really talk about it. He liked avoiding the topic.

Besides, ako naman ang nagsabing wala kaming pakialamanan. I was just waiting

for his reaction. I wasn't planning to give Austin a chance. Either way,

gagawin pa rin naman ni Austin ang gusto niya.

"Ugh, men," I rolled my eyes and stood up to get my things.

I attended two meetings that day and checked some files before going home. I

was waiting for Sevi but he didn't come home. I rolled my eyes. Maybe he was

back in Batangas, trying to avoid me. I heard magkakaroon sila ng project sa

Rizal so I think uuwi at uuwi rin naman siya rito. I smirked.

He wasn't home the whole week. I also flew to Cebu the next week for the

opening of our new resort so I became busy. I was planning to stay there for

one night with Alice just to check if it will go well. I invited some business

partners to stay there and get the full experience. It was nice to stay in an

island and relax for a while.

"Madam, na-delay ang flight so pagkarating natin, diretso kaagad tayo sa

meeting with Mr. Fuebas," Alice reminded me. "I will call him after we land so

we can change the venue. It's better if lunch meeting na lang siya."

"Good day, Ma'am. Do you need anything? Coffee? Water?"

My brows furrowed when I looked at the flight attendant and saw a familiar face.

“Familiar ka,” Yanna whispered.

“Elyse,” I rolled my eyes and placed the magazine down.

“Hindi kita nakilala! Nagpakulay ka ng buhok?” She pointed at my hair.

“Hindi ba siya obvious?” I raised a brow.

“Ilang taon ka nang nawala pero pagbalik mo, maldita ka pa rin talaga, ‘no?”

Sarkastikong tanong niya sa ‘kin. “Nakwento ka nga ni Sam sa ‘kin. Kumusta na kayo ng ex mo? Kung wala kang balak balikan, sa ‘kin na lang siya,” she smirked.

“Where’s Hiro?” I raised my brows.

“Tingin ka sa bintana,” she pointed at the window. “Nakasabit siya sa wing. Kita mo?”

“Ah, Yanna, sobrang ayos mo kausap,” I gave her a fake smile. “No wonder why we never got along. First, Hiro, then second, si Sevi. Sinong susunod na captain, huh?”

“Ha-ha, funny ka,” she rolled her eyes and showed me her hand. “I’m already married to the one driving this plane. Sorry na lang.”

I chuckled when she pushed the trolley and walked away from me. Hindi pa nga

ako nakaka-order! Sabagay, wala naman talaga akong gusto. I had a bottle of

water with me already and I wasn’t that hungry.

I pushed the flight attendant call button just to tease Yanna again. Naglakad

siya palapit sa ‘kin at binigyan ako ng pekeng ngiti.

“Yes, Ma’am?” She said, trying her best not to be rude.

“Pahiram ng asawa mo,” I caressed her hand softly and gave her a smirk.

“Gago,” she rolled her eyes and walked away, ignoring me.

I laughed and leaned on my seat, satisfied by her annoyed face. Alice looked

so confused beside me, probably wondering why I was trying to piss off our

flight attendant for today. Nakangisi tuloy ako hanggang sa pag-land ng

eroplano sa Cebu. Kailangan ko nang umalis dahil late kami sa meeting so hindi

ko na tinawag si Hiro.

“Good day, Miss Ledezma!” The staff greeted. “Let me lead you to your room

po!”

I had the large room all by myself. I wanted to have privacy so I booked

another room for Alice. I pulled my small luggage inside and closed the door

to look around. I was so tired. I had a lunch meeting with a business partner

and then bumyahe pa kami papunta rito sa island using a boat. Pagdating ko,

sunset na.

I took my coat and pants off, leaving me with my black tank top and black

laced panty. I poured wine on the glass before I went outside the balcony

where I had a nice view of the beach. I leaned and sipped on my wine.

I sat on the wooden chair and placed my phone on the other chair so I could

use a timer to take a picture of myself. Tumakbo kaagad ako sa upuan ko

pagkapindot at kinuha ang wine glass. I crossed my legs and looked sideways to

pretend that I was looking at the sunset. Ang ganda ng tama ng araw sa mukha

ko.

“Oh, this is nice,” I giggled after checking my pictures. I decided to post it

since my legs looked long. Nilagay ko ang location para ma-promote naman ‘yung

bago naming resort. I laughed at it.

elydezma: Sweet escape. Who wants to drink wine with me? Vieni qui e baciami.

I laughed before going inside the bathroom to take a nice bath. I covered

myself with bubble and stayed in the bathtub, closing my eyes to relax, until

I heard beeps on my phone. I sighed and wiped my hand on the towel before

getting my phone on the side.

From: Ida

“Come here and kiss me”? Damn she wildin’. Thirsty much sa ex? Hahahaha

I was about to type my reply when a notification popped up.

sevirous liked your photo

“Oh my,” I bit my lower lip and tried to check the list of the people who

liked my photo but his name was suddenly not there. What?! Binawi niya?!

Inis tuloy akong nagbanlaw at nagsuot ng pajamas bago humiga sa kama. I was

staring at my phone all night, waiting for him to send me a message. I mean,

two weeks na kaming hindi nagkikita and he never tried to contact me or

something! I thought uuwi siya noong Sunday but he didn’t! So annoying!

“Oh,” I whispered when I saw that Sevi added something to his IG story.

Sumimangot kaagad ako nang makita ang picture ng niluluto niyang pasta. Nasa

condo siya! Kung kailan wala ako! He didn’t caption anything. It was just a

photo. Hindi ba niya ‘ko hinahanap, huh?

Inis akong nag-reply sa story niya.

elydezma: You probably went home because you knew I wasn’t there.

He replied in an instant.

sevirous: Hindi ko nga alam na nasa Cebu ka.

elydezma: Now you know. Bye.

sevirous: ?

I rolled my eyes and put my phone on the side table, fighting the urge to

reply to him. Narinig ko ang tunog ng phone ko kaya hindi ko na napigilan.

Chineck ko ang messages niya.

sevirous: Attitude ka na naman ah

sevirous: Busy ako. May pinapagawang bahay si Luna sa Tagaytay.

sevirous: Paano ka napunta dyan?

Ang daming messages!

elydezma: There’s this thing called ‘airplane’ I guess.

sevirous: Saya ka?

Inis akong nag-type ulit. I could hear my fingernails against the screen of my

phone.

elydezma: Yes, I’m masaya. I’m having fun with a LOT OF MEN here while you’re

out there busy doing your FIRST LOVE a favor.

sevirous: typing…

Naghintay ako pero nawawala ‘yung ‘typing’. For sure, he didn’t know what to

reply. Inis kong nilagay sa drawer ang phone ko at natulog na lang para hindi

na siya mareplyan. The next day, I woke up early to have a walk on the beach,

and then I went to the spa with Alice so we could relax before we fly back to

Manila.

“Mukhang stressed ka Madam?” Alice asked while we were getting a manicure.

“Nothing. It’s just this.. guy,” I sighed heavily.

“Si Engineer Camero ho ba, Ma’am?” She smiled at me. Gulat akong napatingin sa

kanya. “Napansin ko lang po na medyo close kayo kasi nag-aamuyan ho kayo ng

braso.”

“Hey, it wasn’t like that!” I defended myself.

“Pero ang pogi noon, Madam, ano? I heard captain ball siya sa UST noon? Gosh,

sana pala roon ako nag-aral! Ang saya siguro!” She giggled. “Mukha pa siyang

matalino! Type mo ba, Madam?”

“No,” I scoffed, looking away.

“Sure ka, Madam?” She laughed and pointed at my neck. “Sure ka hindi Sebastian

Vincent Camero ibig sabihin ng SVC sa necklace mo ngayon?”

“Hey!” I touched my necklace. I just wore it today. “No! It means.. Uhm..

Sweetness, Value, and.. and Cash.”

Alice laughed because of my excuse but she didn’t push it further. Mabuti na

lang at nakahinga ako nang maluwag. I painted my nails pink with glitters on

it.

Gabi na nang makarating kami ni Alice sa Manila. Kuya Roel picked me up so

sinabay ko na rin si Alice. Hinatid namin siya sa bahay nila at hinatid ako ni

Kuya Roel sa condo. I was on my phone the whole time. Sevi didn’t reply last

night. Wala na siyang nasabi. I think I got him right there.

Maybe he was still in love with his best friend, huh?

“I’m home,” I said when I arrived in the unit.

The lights were closed so I turned it on and looked around. He wasn’t there.

Umalis na naman ang kumag. I placed my things inside the bedroom and went

straight to the bathroom to take a shower. I went out to the living room to

watch Netflix, wearing my white nighties.

It was just an excuse. I just wanted to stay up late. I was waiting for him

all night! Naka-dalawang movie na ata ako nang biglang bumukas ang pinto. I

turned the television off and shifted on my seat, crossing my legs so I

wouldn’t look too awkward.

I crossed my arms over my chest and raised a brow when Sevi saw me in the

living room. He was blushing a little. Napatakip ako nang kaunti sa ilong ko

nang maamoy ang alak sa kanya. So he was out drinking.

“Nandito ka na pala,” he said while pouring water on his glass.

“No, I’m just an illusion,” masungit na sabi ko.

He chuckled before drinking water. Inubos niya ang isang baso bago nagsalin

ulit. I was just watching him with hawk eyes.

“Are you drunk?” I raised a brow.

“Hindi. Kaunti lang nainom ko,” uminom ulit siya ng tubig. “Sinong sumundo sa

‘yo sa airport? ‘Yung kayakapan mo?”

“What?” My brows furrowed. “His name is Austin and no, Kuya Roel picked me up.

Are you sure you’re not drunk?”

“Tipsy,” he corrected me, may kasama pang hand gesture.

“Okay, just a little drunk, then?” I translated for him. “Sinong kainuman mo?

You have work tomorrow, right?”

“Si Theo.. tsaka si Arkin,” he massaged his head a bit, closing his eyes.

“Ngayon lang siya available, e.”

“Anong ininom n’yo?” I asked again just to see if he can answer right.

“Puking inang black label, pare. Ang sama ng lasa,” he stuck his tongue out a

bit, looking disgusted.

“Pare?” I scoffed.

“Oo, pre, awit nga, e,” he laughed before drinking another glass of water.

“Hindi ako lasing, ah. Baka isipin mo lasing ako. Medyo lang. Tipsy lang.

Hindi ako lasing.”

“Okay?” My brows furrowed. I wasn’t even saying anything. He was obviously

drunk but not THAT drunk because he could walk and pour water on the glass.

“Circle ka ba, Elyse?” He placed the glass back on the table.

“What?” Tinaasan ko siya ng kilay.

“You look hot,” he chuckled.

“I don’t get it. You’re drunk. Let’s go,” I sighed heavily and stood up to

bring him inside the bedroom.

“360 degrees,” he laughed again.

“That’s enough. You need to sleep. Let’s go,” I pulled his wrist until we reached the bedroom.

Iniwan ko siyang nakaupo sa kama bago ako lumabas para kuhanan siya ng damit at towel. I went back to the room and placed his clothes and towel beside him.

I gestured him to go take a shower.

“Are you sure you can take a shower?” I asked, worried.

“Oo nga. Hindi ako lasing,” he said before closing the door.

I waited outside, sitting at the edge of the bed. I bit my lower lip to stop myself from smiling. He looked adorable this way.

I shifted on my seat when he went out of the shower, only wearing a pair of black sweatpants and nothing on top. He had a towel over his neck and he looked so bored and sleepy. I stood up and pushed him again inside the bathroom so he could brush his teeth.

“Inaantok na ‘ko,” he closed his eyes a little, leaning against the countertop.

“You need to brush your teeth before you sleep, okay?” I said, putting toothpaste on his toothbrush. Kinuha ko pa sa kabilang bathroom.

“Ako na,” he tried to get it from me but I moved my hand away. “Amp.”

“Open your mouth,” I threatened.

He rolled his eyes before parting his lips, just enough for me to put the

toothbrush inside his mouth. He was just staring at me while I was brushing

his teeth. I even had to tiptoe so I could reach him so he shifted his weight

and leaned again against the countertop, slanting a bit hanggang sa maabot ko

na siya.

“Smile!” I gave him a cute smile so he would mimick it.

He chuckled when he saw my face but still forced himself to smile. Pagkatapos,

pinagmumog ko na siya. I got my ribbon headband so I could put it on his head.

“Hindi pa ba tapos?” Reklamo niya, aalis na sana.

“Hey! Skincare!” I pushed him back.

“Ouch,” he massaged his hips when it hit the countertop again.

“Oh my, I’m sorry,” I pouted, putting cleanser on the cotton pad.

I went closer to him so I could wipe his face. He pursed his lips and stared

at me while I was wiping him carefully. Nang magtama ang tingin namin,

napatigil ako saglit at umiwas ng tingin. It felt awkward.

“Hindi kayo bagay,” he sarcastically said.

“I know,” tumango ako at tinapon ang cotton pad bago naglagay ng foam cleanser

sa daliri ko para mahugasan ang mukha niya. “I didn’t give him a chance, just

so you know.”

“Alam ko,” he whispered, looking at the ring on my hand.

He closed his eyes like a kid when it came contact with the foam cleanser. I

laughed and told him to wash it off so he could sleep already. Inabutan ko

siya ng towel pagkatapos.

He went out of the bathroom and laid down on the bed, draping his arm over his

face to cover his eyes. I turned the lights off and helped him with the

blanket. Hindi ko alam kung tulog na siya kasi hindi na siya gumagalaw.

“Miss na kita,” he whispered.

My heart pounded over my chest. Napatigil ako at tumingin sa kanya pero

nakatakip ang braso niya sa mata. I slowly covered his body with the blanket,

waiting for him to say more but he didn’t.

“Good night,” I kissed him on his forehead before leaving the room.

I woke up so early because of the harsh light. Sevi turned the lights on

inside the study room and made a loud noise by hitting the metal pan with a

large spoon repeatedly.

“What the fuck?!” I covered my ears, panicking.

I opened my eyes and sat on the bed, confused.

“Gising na! Gising na!” He shouted inside.

“Would you please stop it?!” Binato ko siya ng unan. “What the hell do you want?!”

“Gusto ko lang malaman kung bakit natulog akong walang suot na shirt, pero may suot na headband,” he showed me my pink ribbon headband. “Ni wala man lang boxers o brief! Sweatpants lang?! E ‘di bumakat?!”

“Hey, ewan ko sa ‘yo! Ikaw ang nagbihis sa sarili mo, stupid! And don’t worry, I didn’t look at your crotch!” I shouted back.

“Weh?” He raised a brow.

“Why can’t you remember anything?! I thought you weren’t drunk, huh?!” I glared at him.

“Naaalala ko, putol-putol lang,” he held his head.

He looked like he just came out of the shower. Basa pa ang buhok niya at may towel na nakasabit sa leeg. He was just wearing a pair of black jeans with a belt on. There were little drips of water falling over his chest. His body looked so heavenly in front of me.

“Sinasabi ko na nga ba! Anong ginawa mo sa ‘kin kagabi?” He hugged his body.

“Ang kapal ng mukha mo!” I stood up and hit him again with a pillow. “Get out

of my way!”

Nilagpasan ko siya at pumunta sa kusina para kumuha ng tinapay. I was

muttering curses while toasting the bread. My gosh! Ang aga-aga, nag-iinit na

ang ulo ko sa kanya! His special talent was probably getting on my nerves!

After eating, I went straight to the bathroom to take a shower and brush my

teeth. I was just wearing my robe when I went inside the walk-in closet,

locking it. Pinatuyo ko ang buhok ko at hinayaang nakalugay. I decided to wear

a white tube and a pair of maong high-waisted jeans partnered with white

heels. I put my red Chanel cropped top jacket over my shoulders and got my red

handbag out of the shelf.

When I went of the room, Sevi already left. I rolled my eyes and wore my

designer shades before leaving the unit. Nakasakay na ‘ko sa kotse ko nang

mag-text si Sevi.

From: Engineer Camero

Nasa condo ka pa? Pakuha nung naiwan kong black folder sa study room. Padala

sa Batangas kung pwede. Kung hindi, kukuhanin ko na lang sa ‘yo.

“Ugh!” I hit the steering wheel in annoyance before getting out of the car.

Kinuha ko ang black folder niya. Dalawa ‘yon kaya dalawa na lang ang dinala

ko, then I went back to the parking and sent him a text.

To: Engineer Camero

I’ll go to Batangas after my meeting.

From: Engineer Camero

Haha thanks

“Haha?! So annoying!” I whispered before starting the engine.

Hindi tuloy maganda ang araw ko pagdating sa office. Alice served me my tea

during the meeting. I massaged my head while waiting for the Marketing

employee to set up her PowerPoint presentation.

“Do you like wasting my time?” I asked her, raising a brow.

“I- I’m sorry, Ma’am. There’s a problem with the connector,” she said

nervously.

“You had the time to set that up before I came here,” I looked at my watch

calmly. “Is that right?”

“Y-yes, Ma’am,” she looked down and played with her hands.

I sighed and sipped on my cup of tea, gesturing her to continue. Finally,

after 10 minutes, lumabas na rin sa projector screen ang presentation niya. I pursed my lips and listened to her. She was stuttering but I let that pass.

Maybe I scared her a little.

“Alice, I’m going to Batangas. Text me if you need anything. I already signed some documents. Get it inside my office,” I said while walking back to my office.

“Yes, Madam,” she nodded. “Ingat po kayo!”

Kinuha ko ang mga gamit ko at pumunta na sa parking. I drove all the way from Manila to Batangas just to get him the damn folders! Maybe I should have just asked him to get it in my office, huh? Wrong move, Elyse!

“He’ll pay for your gas money, don’t worry,” I whispered to myself.

It was already around 2 PM when I arrived in Batangas. I went out of the car and walked to the site where I could see people wearing hard hats.

“Engineer Lavin!” I called.

“Miss Ledezma!” He looked at me and gave me a wide smile. “Hanap mo asawa mo?”

“What?” I hit him lightly on his arm using the folders. “Where’s Engineer Camero?”

“Oh, hanap mo nga asawa mo,” he nodded, laughing. “E, kaso, Miss Ledezma,

kakaalis lang ni hubby.”

“What?!” My brows furrowed. “Where the hell did he go?! He asked me to come

here! And please, don’t call him my husband. He’s not!”

“Hindi ba talaga? Kalat na kasi rito na may asawa na siya, e,” he was still

laughing. “I assume na ikaw ‘yon? Sino pa ba?”

“Definitely not me!” I denied. “So where is my husba- Oh god,” napasapo ako sa

noo ko.

He laughed so loud some workers looked at us. Hinampas ko ulit siya sa braso.

It was his fault! Asawa siya nang asawa! Nahawa na tuloy ako!

“Pumuntang Tagaytay, Miss Ledezma. Eto address. May ginagawa siyang mini-

project doon,” he texted me the address.

“Ugh! Fuck him!” I pulled my hair in frustration.

“Ay, bastos. Huwag ganon,” Engineer Lavin laughed.

“Thanks. I need to go,” I gave him a small smile before walking back to my

car.

I looked at my fuel and muttered a curse. Bumaba ulit ako at pumunta kay

Engineer Lavin, holding my car keys.

“Wow, ang bilis naman mag-travel! Kumusta Tagaytay? Malamig ba?” He joked when

he saw me again.

“Can you drive me there?” I asked. “I’m bad with directions and I don’t have

enough fuel.”

“Sure, sure! Sus, ‘yun lang ba?! Wait lang,” he walked away and talked to

Engineer Castillo. They laughed together, hindi ko alam kung anong pinag-

uusapan.

Engineer Lavin owned a white SUV so roon kami sumakay. I’ll just go back here

for my car and make Sevi pay for the gas.

“May malapit namang gasoline station dyan. Empty tank na ba talaga?” Engineer

Lavin asked me while driving.

“Gaano kalapit?” I raised a brow.

“Ah, medyo malayo,” he said.

Wow, ang galing niya kausap. Friends nga sila ni Sevi. I looked outside the

window and bit my finger a little to contain my anger inside me. He could have

texted me that he was leaving! That jerk!

“He was there with Luna, right?” I asked Engineer Lavin.

“Ahh, si Architect Valeria?” He nodded.

“You know her?” I raised a brow. “Why? Palagi ba silang magkasama?”

“Hindi naman,” he chuckled. “Siyempre kilala ko ‘yun! Anak ng may-ari ‘yun,

e!”

Hindi na ‘ko nagsalita pagkatapos non. Engineer Lavin was singing along to the

music the whole ride. He looked so carefree while driving. I must admit that

he was good-looking. Girls would probably flock over him. Friendly pa siya.

“You have a girlfriend?” I asked him.

“Alaws sa ngayon,” he chuckled. “Sinaktan kasi ako dati, Miss Ledezma. Akalain

mo ‘yon?! Sa gwapo kong ‘to?”

“Huh? Who hurt you?” I was fishing for information.

“Architect,” he laughed. “Ang nightmare naming mga engineer. Tsk.”

“Who?” I asked again, curious.

“Si Kierra,” he shrugged.

“What?!” My lips parted. “She.. She’s my.. Uhm..” I couldn’t say it.

“Oh? Kilala mo?” He raised a brow. “Pero okay na ‘yon! Matagal na ‘yon tsaka

friends lang kami ngayon! May kilala ka bang single dyan? Reto mo naman ako.”

“I’ll.. look for.. someone,” I looked outside the window.

Nakaidlip ako nang kaunti papuntang Tagaytay. Nagising ako nang huminto na ang

sasakyan. I retouched my makeup before getting out of the car. I immediately

saw Sevi in front of the house, smiling and talking to Luna.

“Engineer Camero!” I shouted.

Sevi looked at me and whispered something, massaging his head. Padabog akong

naglakad palapit. Bago pa ‘ko makalapit ay umalis na si Luna at pumunta sa

likod, obviously avoiding me or something.

“You made me drive from Manila to Batangas for this!” Hinampas ko sa dibdib

niya ang folders. “Tapos hindi mo man lang ako sinabihan na umalis ka?!”

“Tinatawagan kita,” he pointed out. “Nakapatay cellphone mo.. At nasaan

sasakyan mo? Kaninong sasakyan ‘yan? Kay Theo ba ‘yan?”

“And you care because?!” I shouted.

“Wait lang,” he told me.

I scoffed in disbelief when he went inside to talk to a worker. I waited

outside and looked at the house. Mukhang luma kaya siguro nila ginigiba.

Kanino ba ‘to? Kay Luna?

“Nasaan na ‘yung folder?” Sevi was in front of me again.

“Here!” Padabog kong binigay sa kanya ‘yon. “You’re going to pay for my gas

money.”

I looked at Luna when I saw her looking at the house, meters away from us. She

glanced at me but immediately looked away when she saw me glaring at her. She

looked so confused.

“Huwag mo siyang tignan nang masama,” Sevi scratched his head a little. “Wala

namang ginagawa, e.”

“Paki mo?” Masungit na sabi ko, naiirita sa kanya dahil sa ginawa niya.

“Huwag ka ngang spoiled,” he sighed heavily.

“Wow,” I scoffed and crossed my arms over my chest. “Okay, then. I’m going.

Engineer Lavin! Let’s go!” I shouted.

“Wait,” Sevi grabbed my arm to pull me back. “Wait lang.”

Siya ang lumapit sa sasakyan. May pinag-usapan sila ni Engineer Lavin so I

waited on the bench, covering my ears a little because of the loud noises at

the backyard. My eyes widened when Engineer Lavin drove away, leaving me here

with Sevi!

“What the hell!” Reklamo ko.

“Ako ang maghahatid sa ‘yo,” mariing sabi ni Sevi bago ako suotan ng hard hat.

I rolled my eyes and followed him. He was talking to the workers while I was

beside him, looking around the house. It looked large. Ang ganda siguro ng

view sa taas.

“Hi Ma’am,” a worker smiled at me.

“Doon ka nga muna,” Sevi pointed at the bench.

Sumimangot ako at bumalik sa bench. I sat there alone, pinapanood ang ginagawa

nilang extension sa harapan. When I got bored, I played a game on my phone.

“Tara na,” Sevi stood in front of me.

Kinuha niya ang bag ko at sinabit sa balikat niya habang abala ako sa

paglalaro. I followed him to the gate until he stopped walking because a man

just came out of the car, holding paper bags.

“Ooh, sino siya?” I asked Sevi.

“Attorney Kalix Martinez,” he looked at me. “‘Yung may-ari ng bahay. Ex ni

Luna. Bakit mo tinatanong?”

“Hi! Do you need help?!” I was about to walk towards the hot guy, smiling, but

Sevi pulled on my wrist to stop me. “Hey!”

The guy glanced at us but immediately looked away, probably thinking that Sevi

and I were having a fight. Nang makapasok na siya sa bahay, inagaw ko ang

palapulsuhan ko kay Sevi.

“Laki ng ngiti mo, ah,” he pointed at my face. “Nakakita ka ng gwapo?”

“Of course! Duh!” I giggled. “Maybe he needs help!” Papasok na ulit sana ako

sa loob pero hinatak na naman ako ni Sevi.

“Elyse,” he warned me. “Tara na.”

“Attorne-” Sevi suddenly covered my mouth, glaring at me.

“Tara na. Umuwi na tayo,” he sounded mad. His jaw moved aggressively, staring

at my eyes before moving his hand away from my mouth.

“Seloso!” I teased, smiling.

I stepped backwards when he suddenly turned to me. He pulled my waist closer

to him and leaned to whisper on my ear. I swallowed hard, unable to talk. I

could smell his perfume.

“Oo, nagseselos ako,” he whispered on me. “Kaya huwag mo ‘kong subukan.”

:)

33

“Why are you jealous? Do you like me?”

Sevi didn’t answer me. He was too focused on the road, obviously avoiding my

question. Ngumuso ako at kinuha ang phone ko para maglaro na lang ng mga pang-

Tita games. This guy wouldn’t talk to me!

“I mean, gwapo naman kasi talaga siya,” I whispered.

“Naririnig kita,” mariing sabi niya. He gripped on the steering wheel like he

was trying to contain the anger inside him.

“Gwapo siya,” I repeated, looking at him. “Swerte naman ni Luna. Tsk.”

“Bakit kailangan mong sabihin ‘yan?” Nagsalubong na ang kilay niya habang

nagda-drive.

“Are you jealous because of me or are you jealous because of Luna?” I asked,

preparing my heart for the answer.

“Bakit mo naman dinadamay si Luna rito?” He sighed.

“Do you still like her?” I bit my lower lip and shifted on my seat

uncomfortably. “I mean, now that you’re single and she’s single, maybe both of

you can now-”

“Ang tagal na noon. Huwag mo nang ibalik,” he cut me off. “Kung nagseselos ka

kay Luna, huwag kang mag-alala dahil hindi pa nakaka-move on ‘yon sa ex niya.”

“Well, kung ako rin naman sa pwesto niya,” I giggled, remembering the hot guy

earlier.

“Nakakatawa?” Sevi raised a brow.

“I mean, damn, her ex looked like a walking heartbreak. Serious, tall, good-

looking, rich, what else, huh?” I held on my chin.

“Tangina, karma ko ba ‘to?” He whispered.

“What?” I blinked twice. Hindi ko masyadong naintindihan ang sinabi niya.

“What did you say? I heard karma. Why? What happened?”

“Kung inaasar mo ‘ko, tantanan mo na,” he sounded so mad now.

“Okay,” I pouted and leaned on the shotgun seat. “Hmm, we’re getting my car

first, ah? Then you’ll pay for my gas. It’s your fault!”

“Oo na,” walang pakialam na sabi niya.

“Para saan ba ‘yung folder? It seems like it’s not that urgent naman?” I

looked at the folder he placed at the backseat. Sumimangot ako.

“Hindi nga,” he chuckled.

“Then why the hell did you tell me to go to Batangas?! You demon!” I crossed

my arms over my chest.

“Ang tanong, bakit ka pumuntang Batangas? Pwede ko namang kuhanin na lang sa

‘yo gaya ng sabi ko?” He asked me back.

“I.. I’m.. Uhm,” I looked away. I didn’t know what to say. “I just wanted to

see you. Why?”

He didn’t look a bit surprised because of what I said. The side of his lips

rose while his eyes were still focused on the road. I bit my lower lip and

played with my hands out of embarrassment.

“Same excuse,” he said.

“Huh?” Gulat akong napatingin sa kanya.

“Huhtdog,” walang kwentang sagot niya.

Sumimangot ako at napairap na lang. Sevi was so annoying, what the heck.

Mature lang kapag nasa trabaho, ah! Kapag wala na sa site, iba na ugali! Hmp.

Like what I said, we went to Batangas first to get my car and then he paid for

my gas. Mabuti na lang at umabot ang fuel ko sa gasoline station. Then, I

followed his car to Manila. He was driving normally now, a little fast but

just enough for me to catch up.

I looked at the mini screen on my side when Sevi suddenly called. I clicked the green button before directing my attention back on the road.

“Why?” I asked.

[Nasaan ka na?] Sevi asked.

“Uhm, nasa car?” My brows furrowed.

[I mean, bakit nawala ka sa likuran ko? Hindi na kita makita.]

What? He called because of that? Akala niya ba mawawala ako? Duh, I have GPS!

“Nasa likod ng black Montero. The one behind your car, see? Can you go slower?

Let the Montero overtake,” I said.

Sinunod naman kaagad niya ang sinabi ko. He switched lanes and let the Montero pass, then he drove slower. I positioned my car behind his so he could see me again.

[Saan mo gusto kumain?] He suddenly asked.

“Why? You’re too tired to cook?” I laughed. “Well, me also!”

[Oh, you also?!] He mocked me. [I’m super gulat!]

“Please shut up,” I rolled my eyes, though he couldn’t see it. “Drive-thru na lang. I’m sleepy na. I’m tired of driving.”

[Mauna ka na sa condo. Ako na bibili ng pagkain para makapagpahinga ka na.]

He ended the call immediately. He didn’t even wait for my response! Sinundan

ko na lang tuloy si Waze hanggang Manila, hanggang sa hindi ko na nakita ang

sasakyan ni Sevi. We already parted ways.

Pagkarating ko sa condo, nilapag ko ang mga gamit ko sa kwarto bago dumiretso

sa shower. I showered for 20 minutes and went out wearing my robe. I blowdried

my hair before dressing up. I was just wearing my black silk nightgown when I

went out of the room.

“Bakit ang tagal niya?” I whispered to myself.

I sat on the couch and browsed on Netflix, trying to find something to watch

but stopped when an idea came into me. I opened the ‘Sebastian’ profile so I

could see his ‘continue watching’ movies and series. Pansin ko itong profile

na ‘to ang madalas niyang ginagamit, e.

I was hoping to see adult movies just to tease him about it but they were all

mind-blowing series and documentaries. May isang k-drama lang siyang

pinapanood doon. The one I used to fangirl to! So pinapanood na niya ‘yun,

huh?!

I immediately turned the television off when I heard the door. I stood up to sit at the dining table, ready to eat dinner. Sevi went inside the study room so fast, then he closed it. Pagkalabas niya, nagulat pa siyang nakaupo na ‘ko roon.

“Are you hiding something?” I asked.

“Anong itatago ko?” He raised a brow before pulling the chair in front of me.

Napanguso ako habang sinisingkitan siya ng mata. He was being so weird but..

Okay. I just let that pass. Inabot niya sa ‘kin ang paperbag ng pagkain ko at nilabas ko na ‘yon para kainin. Sevi was too quiet. I was used to his silence already ever since I came back but this time, he looked so weird because he kept on glancing at me like he was watching my actions.

“Seriously, what’s your problem?” I put my utensils down.

“Wala nga,” he glanced at the clock again. “Kumain ka na lang dyan.”

I pursed my lips and continued eating, still watching him with my hawk eyes.

He kept on looking around to avoid my eyes. Mukhang naiilang siya sa tingin ko

kaya umiwas na lang din ako. Nauna akong matapos kumain kaya niligpit ko na

ang pinagkainan ko bago bumalik sa living room. I wasn’t sleepy yet. I wanted

to watch a movie.

“Hindi ka pa matutulog?” Sevi asked while he was cleaning the table.

“No, I’m not sleepy yet. Do you want to watch a movie with me?” I asked.

“Hindi. May trabaho pa ‘ko,” masungit na sabi niya bago pumasok ng study room.

Napasimangot ako at tumayo na lang para patayin ang ilaw sa living room so I

could watch better. I ended up watching a romantic movie. It was a bad idea

because all I could think about was Sevi. Sa sobrang dami ng memories namin,

nakakarelate ko sa mga scenes sa movie. I sighed heavily, trying to stop the

tears from falling.

“Why did they have to break-up?!” Reklamo ko. “They were so happy, what the

hell! Who’s your director, huh?!”

“Sinong kausap mo dyan?”

Napaupo kaagad ako nang lumabas si Sevi sa study room. He leaned on the wall

sideways, with his arms crossed over his chest. He looked fresh from the

shower. Wait, did he take a shower inside the bedroom? Akala ko ba sa akin

‘yung bathroom na ‘yon! Unfair pero okay lang.

He was wearing a pair of black sweatpants and a white shirt. His hair still looked a little messy after running his hand through it. I bit my lower lip and looked away. His biceps were distracting me.

“I was talking to the.. movie,” I pointed at the screen. “They.. uhm.. They broke up.”

“Ah, relate ka?” He scoffed, shaking his head a bit.

“Whatever,” I rolled my eyes and tried to find another movie. Tapos na, e! That was the ending! “Why are you still awake?”

“May trabaho pa nga ako,” he glanced at the clock again before walking back to the study room.

I couldn’t find another movie to watch so I just turned the television off and walked towards the balcony. I opened the sliding door before leaning against the railings, admiring the view. I remembered a moment with Sevi, where I told him that someday, he will be the one behind the construction of those tall buildings. I smiled by myself. It really happened, huh?

I stayed outside for a few minutes until I felt cold. Binuksan ko ulit ang sliding door at pumasok na sa loob. I suddenly stopped walking when I realized that the lights were all turned off. I tried to find the switch, using the

screen of my phone as the little flashlight.

“Happy birthday to you..”

“What the heck!” I held my chest in surprise when I saw Sevi holding a cake.

Nakasindi na rin ang kandilang naroon.

He walked towards me, singing a happy birthday, then stopped in front of me,

gesturing me to make a wish. I glanced at the clock. It was exactly 12 AM. I

pursed my lips and looked at my phone to check the date.

“Oh my god,” I covered my face using my hands.

“Uy, ano na? Mawawala na ‘yung sindi, oh,” Sevi tried to cover the candles

using his other hand.

“I fucking hate you,” I whispered as tears started pooling on my eyes.

I forgot about it. I also thought that he would probably forget about it. My

birthday wasn’t the same anymore ever since my mom died. I actually didn’t

want to celebrate my birthday anymore because it wasn’t that special to me..

At least, not anymore. Noong umalis ako, si Ida lang at ako ang nagce-

celebrate kahit ayaw ko. She was just persistent.

“Uy, umiiyak ka ba?” Sevi sounded worried.

“Why would you do this?” I cried, covering my face.

“Hala, I’m sorry. Akala ko.. Hey,” Sevi tried to move my hands away from my

face so he could see me.

I put my hands down. He placed the cake on the table so he could hold my

wrists. My vision was a little blurry because of the tears but I could still

see how worried he was to see me crying. I tried to wipe the tears away but

they just kept on falling.

“I’m sorry,” Sevi whispered. “Ayaw mo ba?”

“I thought you forgot about it,” I was still crying. “Because I did..”

“Paano ko makakalimutan ‘yon?” He chuckled. “Huwag ka nang umiyak. Sisindihan

ko tuloy ulit ‘yung kandila. Wait lang.”

So that was why he was acting so weird! He kept on glancing on the clock and

he probably hid the cake inside the study room. Kaya pala natagalan siya sa

labas! What the hell. I didn’t even suspect anything.

Sinindihan niya ulit ang mga kandila bago kinuha ang cake at tinapat sa ‘kin.

I was staring at it, remembering our last encounter here.. also with a cake.

“I’m sorry,” I cried more.

Sevi’s smile suddenly faded when he realized what my apology meant. His lips

parted, wanting to say something but he couldn’t. Pain suddenly filled his eyes and he didn’t want to show it to me so he looked away.

“I’m so sorry,” my voice broke.

He slowly placed the cake back on the table before pulling on my wrist to give me a tight hug. I cried on his chest, apologizing over and over. He didn’t say anything. He just started caressing my hair.

“Hipan mo na ‘yung kandila,” nahihirapang sabi niya.

I wiped my tears away and stepped back so he would let go of me. The feeling of guilt suddenly came back inside me. I leaned over the dining table to blow the candles without making a wish. Sevi was just standing there without looking at me.

I went straight inside the bedroom to cry myself to sleep. Sevi did not bother entering the room. He stayed outside, or maybe he stayed inside the study room.

The next day, I woke up around 8 AM, obviously late for work. Sevi didn’t bother waking me up. Pagkalabas ko ng kwarto, wala na siya. The cake was already placed inside the fridge. I sighed before taking a shower.

I went inside the walk-in closet to get my things. I felt lazy to dress up

today so I was just wearing a pink off-shoulder jumpsuit. I put my white heels

on and got my red bag. I let my hair down and wore my shades to cover my eyes.

Halatang umiyak ako kagabi.

I left a post-it note on the fridge before pulling my luggage out of the unit.

‘Sev,

Thanks for making me stay here for a short period of time.

You can have your freedom back now.’

I realized how selfish I was for even coming back here after leaving him

heartbroken. It must have been hard for him to deal with me. I tortured him so

bad. I brought a cake on our fifth anniversary, and then broke up with him on

the same day. Kung may chance lang siguro siya na makalipat ng condo, ginawa

niya na but that was too much work for him.

He didn’t want to see me anymore. He told me that before. Bakit ba pilit ko pa

ring pinagsisiksikan ang sarili ko? It must have been painful for him.

“Happy birthday, Miss Ledezma!”

I was suprised to see employees gathered outside my office, holding gifts and

flowers. May pinasabog pa silang confetti. I laughed and thanked everyone. I

received so many gifts that I couldn’t hold them anymore. Austin came and

helped me with it, pati sa mga bulaklak.

“Thank you so much everyone,” I said. “Because of this, you guys can go home

after lunch break. Spend time with your families and friends.”

Everyone cheered. I smiled before walking inside my office with Austin

stalking me from behind. He placed the gifts and flowers on the table before

walking towards my table.

“Happy birthday,” he smiled and gave me a kiss on my cheek.

“Thanks,” I said while reading a document. “Good thing you guys didn’t plan a

party. I hate parties.”

“I know,” he chuckled. “I have a gift for you.”

He placed a velvet box in front of me. My brows furrowed when I opened it and

saw a diamond ring. Naguguluhan akong tumingin sa kanya, nagtatanong kung para

saan ang regalong ‘yon.

“Hey, it doesn’t mean anything. I just noticed that your ring is getting old

already," he pointed at my knot ring. "So you should replace it."

"O-oh," I looked away. "Thank you."

I couldn't even take it off. Sanay na 'kong suotin ang singsing na 'to. It

symbolized my love for him. Siguro kapag nakamove-on na 'ko sa kanya, saka ko

lang makakayang hubarin ang knot ring. It was like.. already tied to me.

"Do you want to have dinner together?" Austin asked. "Birthday dinner?"

"Yeah, sure," I answered casually.

"Yes," he whispered like it was an achievement. "Formal dinner? I mean, okay

na 'yang suot mo. I'll text you the address. I will reserve a table in a

luxurious restau-"

"What's up, everyone?!"

My eyes widened when the door opened and it revealed a woman wearing a white

floral romper partnered with silver heels and maroon bag. She took her shades

off and smiled at me.

"Ida!" I stood up and ran towards her to give her a tight hug.

"Happy birthday!" Ida sounded so excited. "Were you surprised?! Obviously, it

was a surprise! Ah! I missed you!"

“Oh my god, I want to cry,” I let her go and wiped my fake tears. “You’re

here! You’re finally here!”

“Yes, for good,” she flipped her hair. “How are you, honey? And..” She glanced

at Austin. “Why is he here?”

Austin scoffed sarcastically. “I was asking Elyse out for dinner-”

“Dinner! Tamang tama! I’m starving!” Ida laughed and sat on the couch,

crossing her legs.

“Hindi kita inaya-”

“I don’t care,” Ida cut him off. “It’s not your birthday. It’s my bestfriend’s

birthday! Ah, omg! Elyse! May gift ako sa ‘yo, but don’t open it yet! For your

eyes only!”

“Really?!” I sat beside her, excited.

Austin shook his head and walked out of the office. Hindi ko na siya pinansin

dahil naging abala ako sa regalo ni Ida. She was so talkative. Ang dami niyang

kinekwento at ang dami ko ring kinwento sa kanya. I summarized everything that

happened ever since I came back here. Hindi na kasi kami gaanong nakakapag-

Facetime. We were both busy with work.

“Let’s go out for drinks this Saturday! G?” Pag-aaya ni Ida.

“Of course. Finally, may kasama na ‘ko. Doon tayo sa club ni Sam! She can get

us a table,” I suggested.

It was around 7 PM when Ida and I went out to have a birthday dinner with

Austin. It was a high-end place. Everyone was wearing formal and I could even

see some familiar faces. Mga nakikita ko sa parties, and sa television.

“Is this your treat?” Ida asked Austin pagkaupo namin. “Because if it is, then

I’ll order the most expensive food-”

“What’s yours, Elyse?” Austin ignored her. He was obviously getting annoyed by

Ida. I laughed.

“Kung ano kay Ida,” I shrugged.

“Hah,” Ida smirked at Austin. “Anyway, sige na nga, this is my treat na since

birthday ni Elyse! I want to treat her! Austin, pay for your own food.”

“What the fuck are you smoking?” Austin looked at her.

“Would you excuse me, please,” I stood up when I saw a familiar face.

I smiled when my brother waved his hand on me, putting his phone down. He

called me earlier to ask where I’ll celebrate my birthday so he can greet me

in person. I walked towards him and gave him a hug. He was wearing a white

button-down dress shirt, grey necktie, and black slacks. Nakasabit sa braso

ang coat na hinubad.

“Happy birthday,” he said after I let him go. “I’m sorry. I was busy with

work. Ngayon lang kita napuntahan.”

“Hey, it’s fine, Kuya,” I smiled. “At least you came here! May kasama ka ba? A

woman?”

“Wala, e,” he chuckled, getting where I was coming from. “Lalaki lang.”

“What? Who?” I looked around. My lips slowly formed a wide smile when I saw a

familiar man getting out of the elevator, mukhang kakarating lang.

“Hey, happy birthday,” Hiro greeted me and gave me a kiss on the cheek.

“Hey! I booked one of your flights to Cebu but I didn’t have time to greet

you,” I pouted. “But I successfully pissed off your wife so.. I still achieved

something.”

“She really was,” Hiro chuckled. “But don’t worry. I calmed her down,” he

smirked.

“What the fuck,” I made a disgusted face.

“What the fuck, bro,” my brother did the same.

“I didn’t even say anything,” Hiro was laughing. “Anyway, here’s my gift.”

He handed me a designer paper bag. Napangiti kaagad ako nang makita ang bag

doon. He knew me well! Inabot din ni Kuya sa ‘kin ang isang paper bag. It was

a pair of shoes this time! Niyakap ko silang dalawa, tuwang-tuwa.

“Aalis na kami,” paalam ni Kuya. “We’re going out for a drink.”

“Okay, take care,” I waved at them before walking back to our table.

The dinner went peacefully. Austin kept on ignoring Ida’s talkative ass.

Pakiramdam niya siguro nakakagulo si Ida sa aming dalawa since ako lang ang

inaya niya mag-dinner, but it was my birthday so ako ang masusunod.

“Can I stay in your place for the meantime?” I asked Ida after dinner. “Tapos

na ba siya gawin?”

“Yes, kahapon lang! Buti umabot! Of course you can stay with me! No need to

ask!” Ida put her hand on my shoulder.

“Bye Austin,” I gave him a smile. “Thanks for tonight.”

I was so tired when we arrived at Ida’s penthouse. Pagkatapos ko mag-shower,

binagsak ko na kaagad ang sarili ko sa couch. Ida was doing her skincare when

she went out and sat beside me, pushing my feet away to give her space.

“So bakit ka nandito sa condo ko? Bakit wala ka sa condo n’yo?” She raised a

brow.

“I already left,” umayos ako ng upo at sumandal.

“Why did you leave?” She asked again.

“I just realized how selfish I am, you know?” I gave her a sad smile. “I

remembered how I broke up with him.. and left him while he was going through..

a lot. I should have stayed, right? Kahit ilang linggo lang para masiguradong

okay siya, but I was so eager to leave.”

“Hey,” Ida sighed and held my hand. “It wasn’t your fault. Don’t feel bad for

choosing yourself. Sevi had other support system. He had his family and his

friends with him. Don’t blame yourself for leaving.”

“He surprised me on my birthday,” my voice broke. “He.. He bought me a cake..

and he celebrated it with me. I was scared for him.”

“Scared that?”

“I was scared that I might.. I might hurt him again. I was scared that his

family wouldn’t accept me again.” I looked up to stop my tears from falling.

“I don’t know what I want anymore. I want him to be with me but I also don’t

want to be selfish.”

“Did he ever stop loving you?” Ida raised a brow.

“Maybe,” I chuckled, wiping my tears. “It’s not too late to stop, right?”

“You think so?” Ida asked. “After leading him on like that? You will leave him

again without saying anything? I think ‘yun ata ang unfair. You shouldn’t have

left like that.”

“Let me just.. think for now,” I closed my eyes and covered my face.

“You can’t start over again if you are still stuck in the past,” Ida tapped my

shoulder before walking away.

The next day, I still went to work, a little late again because Ida’s condo

was a little far from the company. I was stuck in traffic. It was my routine

for the whole week. Sevi and I didn’t have any communication for a week. Ida

postponed our clubbing night because she had a schedule with her family.

I was late again. Pagkapasok ko ng office, sinabihan kaagad ako ni Alice na

dumiretso na sa board room para sa meeting. Ni hindi ko nga alam na may

meeting pala.

“Good morning,” I greeted everyone when I went inside the board room.

I sat in front and scanned through the folder provided in front of me. I stopped when the door opened and Sevi went inside, wearing a white dress shirt and black slacks. He looked so fresh in the morning, like he wasn't even affected when I left. Good for him.

"Apologies, Miss Ledezma. Traffic," he said before getting seated.

"It's fine," my voice was almost a whisper. I couldn't look at him.

I couldn't concentrate on the meeting. I listened on some parts but my brain just kept on flying to him. Napapasulyap ako sa kanya habang abala siya sa pakikinig. Ni isang beses hindi nagtama ang tingin namin. It almost looked like he was avoiding my gaze.

After the meeting, kinuha ko na ang mga gamit ko at naglakad palabas. I stopped in front of the door when Sevi held on the door handle. He looked at me and immediately let go of the handle, pursing his lips.

"You can leave first, Miss Ledezma," seryosong sabi niya.

"T-thanks," I looked away.

"Tutal, doon ka magaling," he sarcastically said.

I stiffened. Napatingin ako sa kanya pero tinalikuran na niya 'ko at nakipag-usap sa kaibigan niya. I cleared my throat before leaving the room with Alice

behind me.

“Magkaaway po ata kayo, Madam,” Alice carefully said.

“N-no, we’re.. We’re not,” I denied.

I stopped walking so Alice also stopped. I sighed heavily and massaged my head, getting frustrated now.

“Anong oras tapos ng last kong meeting for today?” I asked Alice.

“4 PM, Madam,” she answered.

“Okay,” I nodded. “I’m going to.. Batangas after.”

I’ll just try my luck. Pagkabalik ko sa office, tinext ko kaagad si Engineer Lavin para tanungin kung pupunta roon si Sevi ngayong araw.

From: Engineer Lavin

Yes dito na siya natutulog sa hotel. Magkaaway ata ang mag-asawa? Ayaw umuwi nung isa?

I rolled my eyes before typing a reply.

To: Engineer Lavin

No we’re not fighting, and I already moved out.

From: Engineer Lavin

Nyek kaya pala badtrip siya lagi, e. Nilayasan n’yo lang isa’t-isa hahaha

Hindi na ‘ko nag-reply. I was just waiting for 4 PM all day. Hindi na ‘ko

nakapag-focus sa last meeting ko dahil abala na ‘ko sa kakaisip kung ano ang

sasabihin ko kay Sevi. Engineer Lavin informed me that Sevi was already there

on the site so umalis na kaagad ako sa office.

Medyo madilim na nang makarating ako sa Batangas. I was impulsive. I still

didn’t know what to say to him. His words earlier struck me.

“Engineer Lavin!” I called.

“Naroon! Sa beach! Nagmumuni-muni!” He shouted back. He was busy talking to

Engineer Castillo. “Nagdadrama roon, ‘di ba pre?”

Good thing I changed my heels to flats. Hindi ako nahirapang maglakad sa

buhanginan. I saw Sevi beside the beach, watching the waves. Hinahangin ang

polong suot at ang buhok kaya medyo magulo. He was picking a rock and throwing

it on the water.

“Engineer Camero,” I stopped walking.

He turned to me with a surprised look on his face, pero napalitan din ng

galit. He shook his head and walked away from me. I sighed heavily before

running towards him.

“Hey,” I grabbed his arm.

“Ano?” He hissed, pulling his arm back. “Ano na naman ba ‘yun, Elyse? Bakit ba

nandito ka?”

“We need to talk,” I told him.

He scoffed in disbelief before looking away from me, thinking. I bit my lower

lip and walked closer to him.

“I’m sorry,” I said softly.

“Ang hilig mo talagang umalis, tapos bumalik, tapos umalis ulit, tapos bumalik

na naman, tangina,” he couldn’t look at me. “Ano ba talagang gusto mo?”

“You didn’t want me there at the first place. I already left. The unit is all

yours now. I did you a favor, right?” I asked. “I left to give you space-”

“Ngayon pa?” He looked at me with so much pain in his eyes.

I couldn’t talk. He sighed and looked away again. Tears slowly formed at the

corner of his eyes, which made my heart hurt.

“Pagkatapos mo kong sanayin na.. na nandyan ka.. Aalis ka ulit,” his voice

broke. He covered his eyes and shook his head.

“What do you really want me to do? Hindi ba masakit sa ‘yo na manatili ako

roon?” A tear fell from my eye.

“Mas masakit ‘yung pag-iwan mo kaysa sa pananatili mo, Elyse,” he started crying. “Wala nang mas sasakit pa roon..”

I looked up the sky when I felt droplets of rain. I grabbed Sevi’s arm and tried to pull him back to the office but he refused to walk.

“It’s going to rain. Come on,” I tried again but he pulled his arm away from me.

“Hinanap kita,” he bit his lower lip, looking down on the sand.

“W-what?” I blinked twice.

“Hinanap kita.. Noong umalis ka noon. Hinanap kita. Binalak kong sundan ka,

kahit sinabi kong ayaw na kitang makita, tangina, kahit masulyapan ka lang,

masaya na ‘ko,” he gave me a sarcastic smile. “Para kong niloloko sarili ko.”

“I’m sorry,” I started crying too.

“Limang taon, Elyse,” he tried to wipe his tears away but they kept on falling. “Limang taon.. Paano kita makakalimutan? Paano? Sabihin mo sa ‘kin

kasi, tangina, kahit anong gawin ko, ayaw talaga, e..”

“I don’t know, Sevi! I never tried,” I shook my head.

“Talaga?” He scoffed. “Bakit parang ang dali sa ‘yo? Bakit noong nakita mo ‘ko

ulit, ang dali sa ‘yong ngumiti? Ang dali sa ‘yong pakisamahan ako

pagkatapos.. Pagkatapos mo ‘kong iwan.. Paano ‘yun?”

“I was happy to see you again. I was dying to see you again but I tried to

stop myself because you told me to never show myself to you again,” I

explained. “Sev, it was hard for me, too..”

“Limang taon ‘yun, Elyse,” he cried. “Halos lahat ng gawin ko, naaalala kita.

Pag gising, pag-kain, pag-inom, pag-alis, pag-uwi, lahat..”

“It was never easy for me, Sevi. I had to leave because I wanted to have time

for myself. I needed to save myself, too.. I lost everyone. I lost my family!

I lost my support system! I had no one at that time,” I hissed.

“Naiintindihan ko naman, e,” Sevi nodded. “Naiintindihan ko naman.. Ang hindi

ko maintindihan.. Bakit umalis ka na naman? Gustong gusto mo ba ‘kong

sinasaktan? May nagawa ba ‘kong mali? Gusto ko lang naman i-celebrate ‘yung

birthday mo.. Ano bang ginawa ko?”

“I’m sorry,” I tried to hold his hand. “I realized a lot of things. I felt

guilty. I felt selfish for.. wanting us to go back together again.”

“Bakit kailangan mo ‘kong iwan ulit?” He broke down.

My knees fell on the sand so we could be on the same level. He looked down,

avoiding my eyes. My vision was so blurry because of my tears. I could hear

the waves, the air, his pain and mine.

“Ginawa ko naman lahat para manatili ka ulit.. Ako na nagluluto, ako na rin

nagbabayad ng lahat, kung pwede lang, ako na rin maglinis at mahugas, huwag ka

lang umalis ulit. Bumabawi na ‘ko sa lahat ng kasalanan ko sa ‘yo noon, Elyse,

bakit.. Bakit umalis ka na naman?” He asked with so much pain in his voice.

“I’m sorry. I was a coward. I was scared for us,” I sat beside him. “Aren’t

you scared for us, Sevi? What if we get hurt again?”

He looked at the beach, wiping his tears away. He inhaled a large amount of

air to calm himself down. I was staring at him, waiting for his answer.

“Mas kaya kong tiisin ang sakit kapag nandyan ka,” He whispered.

.

34

TW: harassment

“Ma, bakit ba kasi kailangan kasama pa ‘ko? Hindi ko naman ‘yan kilala.”

Kanina pa ‘ko nagrereklamo kay Mama pero parang wala siyang naririnig. Sinuot

ko na lang ang coat ko dahil bumusina na si Arkin sa labas ng bahay, sinusundo

kami. Binuksan niya ang artista van niya at agad ngumisi sa ‘kin.

“Wow, pogi mo naman, pre,” tumawa pa si gago.

“Sana ikaw rin,” sagot ko bago ako umupo sa tabi niya.

“Steven ha. Alagaan mo ang kapatid mo,” paalala pa ni Mama bago sumakay sa

van.

Pumikit lang ako at nagpahinga nang kaunti habang nasa byahe papunta roon sa

venue ng hotel. Tangina, hindi naman dapat ako kasama rito pero sinama ako

para raw libre sasakyan. Pwede raw kami magpasundo kay Arkin. Isa pa ‘tong

hayop na ‘to, e. Namimilit pa, e.

“Sino ba ‘yung may birthday?” Iritang tanong ko. “‘Paka-corny naman niyan.

Padebut-debut pa.”

“Bobo ka, p’re. Mayaman kasi ‘yon,” tumawa si Arkin.

“O, ano naman? Ayoko sa mayayaman,” ngumisi ako. “Ang aarte, e.”

“Ah, pero si Luna, okay lang?” Pang-aasar niya sa ‘kin.

“Nakamove-on na ‘ko! May progress. Sana ikaw din mayroon,” tinapik ko siya sa

balikat para asarin. Hinampas niya lang ang kamay ko.

“Anak ‘yon ng boss ko, Sebastian. Ayusin mo ‘yang ugali mo mamaya,”

pinagalitan ako ni Mama nang marinig usapan namin. “Naku, kapag ako natanggal

talaga sa trabaho, malilintikan ka sa ‘kin.”

“Luh, maayos naman ako, ah,” reklamo ko pa. “Maganda ba ‘yun, Kino?”

“Bakit mo ‘ko tinatanong? E’di tignan mo mamaya,” inirapan niya ‘ko.

Sa tagal ng byahe namin dahil sa traffic, nakalimutan ko na ata pangalan ko.

Lintek, nahilo-hilo pa ‘ko pagbaba ng van dahil sa pahinto-hinto. Bwisit na

traffic ‘yan. Bakit kasi hindi ayusin ‘yung transportation system para hindi

na bumili nang bumili ng sasakyan mga tao?! Napakahirap kaya mag-commute dito!

“P’re, tara na,” hinatak ako ni Arkin papasok ng venue. Nakasunod sa likod

namin si Mama, dala-dala ‘yung invitation.

Pagkapasok namin, si Mama roon na pumunta sa table nilang mga empleyado habang

ako, umupo sa parehong table kay Arkin. Napangisi ako. Puro bigatin kasama

namin sa table, ah! Mga artista tsaka mga model. Ayos ‘yon. Baka mapagkamalan

pa ‘kong artista rito. Hindi naman ganoon kahirap.

“Hi,” bati ko sa babaeng nasa kabilang upuan. “Parang nakita na kita.”

“Is that a pick-up line?” Tumawa siya.

“Hala, hindi, ah. Nakita na talaga kita. Model ka ba?” Curious lang naman ako

kaya ko natanong.

“Yes. I’m Giselle, by the way,” ngumiti siya sa ‘kin at nakipagkamay.

“Oh? Sabi na nga ba kaya-”

“P’re, tama na landi. Magsisimula na,” umupo si Arkin sa gitna namin,

tinatawanan ako. “Selle, sorry about my friend. He’s actually heartbroken.”

“Alam mo, ang bobo mo,” bulong ko sa kanya.

Hindi na siya nakasagot sa ‘kin dahil nagsimula na ‘yung party.

Nakapahalumbaba lang ako sa lamesa at inuubos ‘yung appetizer na binigay.

Muntik na ‘kong mabulunan nang pumasok na ‘yung debutant at naglakad sa red

carpet.

Medyo maputi, may kaunting bangs, maganda pero mukhang maarte. Natawa ako

habang ngumingiti siya sa mga bisita niya. Hindi ko alam kung totoong ngiti ba

‘yon o ano. Para siyang bata.

“Hindi ba 7th birthday ‘tong inattendan natin?” Bulong ko kay Arkin.

“Tangina mo, ayusin mo,” tumawa siya at tinulak ang braso ko.

Umiwas na ‘ko ng tingin at tinuon na lang ang atensyon ko sa tubig na nasa

harapan ko. Gusto ko sana juice. Dapat juice na lang ang binigay. Oo, choosy

pa ‘ko kasi yummy naman ako.

“P’re, CR lang ako,” inabot sa ‘kin ni Arkin ‘yung hawak niyang rose.

Napakunot kaagad ang noo ko at tumingin sa kanya. “Ano? 18 roses na, ah?!”

“Ikaw na pumunta roon pag hindi ako umabot. Najejebs ako, promise,”

nagmamadali siyang umalis.

“Hoy-” Hindi ko na siya napigilan dahil tumakbo na siya paalis. Hindi ko alam

kung nantitrip ‘yung kupal na ‘yon o ano!

“Larkin Sanchez,” tawag nung emcee.

Gago ka, Kino. Bahala ka sa buhay mo. Hindi ako pupunta dyan sa harapan.

Nagbulungan na ‘yung mga tao at lumingon na rin sa paligid ‘yung debutant.

Napamura na naman ako bago ako tumayo at maglakad palapit. Naawa ako sa itsura

niya. Para siyang hindi sinipot sa date.

Inabot ko sa kanya ang rose at padabog niyang kinuha sa ‘kin ‘yon. Aguy,

attitude siya, e.

Awkward kong nilagay ang mga kamay ko sa bewang niya at nilagay naman niya ang

mga kamay niya sa balikat ko. Hindi ko alam kung saan ako titingin dahil

masama ang tingin sa ‘kin nung babae.

“Who the fuck are you,” galit na bulong niya sa ‘kin.

“Nasa restroom si Kino,” pagpapaalam ko.

“Go Camero!” Sigaw nung kakilala kong player ng La Salle. Napangisi ako at

sinaluduhan siya habang sinasayaw ko ‘yung babae sa harapan ko. Ni hindi ko

nga ‘to kilala.

Napatingin ako ulit sa babae nang bigla niyang i-baon ang kuko niya sa balikat

ko sa sobrang higpit ng hawak niya sa ‘kin. Nagsalubong kaagad ang kilay ko at

tinignan siya nang masama. Anak ng? Bakit nananakit pa?! Siya na nga ‘yung

sinipot, e!

“Go, you prick,” bulong niya sa ‘kin nang i-announce ng emcee ‘yung susunod.

“Okay, chill. Galit na galit,” tumawa ako bago naglakad pabalik sa table.

Nawala ang ngiti ko nang makita ko na si Arkin na nakaupo roon at tinatawanan

ako. Malakas ko siyang binatukan bago ako umupo. Tawa pa rin nang tawa ‘yung

gago.

“Baka ‘yan na forever mo, p’re,” pang-aasar niya pa.

“Eto ka, oh,” tinaas ko ang middle finger ko sa harapan ng mukha niya.

Hinihintay ko na lang talagang matapos ‘yung party. Mabuti na lang at masarap

‘yung pagkain nila kaya hindi ako gaanong na-bored. Nang maglibot-libot na

‘yung debutant, pumunta ako sa table nila Wayne, basketball player ng La

Salle. Nagkwentuhan kami saglit hanggang sa tinawag ako ni Arkin para

ipakilala roon sa may birthday.

“Kahapon ang birthday ko, hindi ngayon,” masungit na sagot niya sa ‘kin.

“O, e’di happy birthday!” Nag peace sign ako para naman mabawasan ang galit

niya sa ‘kin. Aba, inirapan ba naman ako!

Pagkatapos ng party, pinilit na naman ako ni Arkin sumama sa after-party kahit

hindi naman ako imbitado roon. Uwing-uwi na ‘ko pero sabi niya ipapakilala

niya raw ako sa mga kaibigan niya at magrereto siya kaya sumama na lang ako.

Pinahatid ni Arkin sa driver niya si Mama para hindi mainip. Alangan namang

isama ko si Mama sa inuman?

“Lasing na ‘yun, oh,” siniko ko si Arkin at tinuro si Elisa, ‘yung may

birthday.

“She doesn’t drink,” sagot naman ni Arkin sa ‘kin. “Crush mo ba? Kung crush

mo, tutulungan kita. Ano, game?”

“Ulol,” umirap ako at binottoms-up ‘yung tequila.

Nakaka-sampung shot na ‘ko, hindi pa rin ako nalalasing. Hindi naman kasi ako

madaling malasing, e. Iniwan ako ni Arkin saglit para makipag-usap sa mga

kaibigan niyang artista kaya naiwan ako sa may tabi ng pool.

“Oh,” hinawakan ko kaagad si Elisa sa braso nang muntik na siyang matumba.

“Ikaw na naman!” Tinuro niya ‘ko.

“Sorry, hindi ako kumakausap ng lasing,” tumawa ako at naglakad na paalis.

Napatigil ako nang biglang may humatak sa coat ko. Hindi pa ‘ko nakakalingon,

napamura na ‘ko dahil nahatak niya ‘ko papunta sa pool. Mabuti na lang

marunong akong lumangoy, anak ng!

Umahon kaagad ako at umupo sa gilid para tanggalin ang coat ko na nagpapabigat

sa katawan ko. Tumakbo kaagad si Arkin papunta sa ‘kin para tawanan ako kasi

kupal siya. Sinuklay ko ang buhok ko para hindi nakaharang sa mukha ko bago ko

tinanggal isa-isa ang pagkabutones ng polo ko. Hinubad ko sa balikat ko kaya

nilamig kaagad ako.

Hay, badtrip! Umupo kaagad ako sa lounge chair at tinanggal ang mga gamit sa

bulsa ko. Buti na lang wala akong dinalang wallet dahil wala naman akong pag

gagastusan ngayong araw. Napailing ako nang ilabas ang cellphone ko. Hinubad

ko na rin ang basang sapatos at medyas ko.

“U-uhm,” lumapit sa ‘kin si Elisa.

Tinignan ko lang siya saglit bago piniga ang polo ko para matanggal ‘yung

tubig.

“Towel,” inabutan niya ‘ko ng twalya.

Hindi ako nagsalita at kinuha na lang ang cellphone ko para tignan kung gagana

pa. Sinubukan kong buksan pero namatay lang din. Anak ng! Dapat pala nilagay

ko sa bigas, e. Effective ba ‘yon? Napamasahe tuloy ako sa ilong ko sa sobrang

inis.

Nag-offer siya ng bagong cellphone pero mas kailangan ko ang bagong damit.

Umalis kaagad siya para may mautusan bumili.

“P’re, ang usapan debut ang pupuntahan, bakit uuwi akong parang galing sa

outing?” Sabi ko kay Arkin.

“Kung ako sa ‘yo, tatanggapin ko na ‘yung cellphone. Wala lang sa kanya ‘yan.

Mayaman ‘yan,” sabi ni Arkin.

“Ayoko nga. Magka-utang na loob pa ‘ko diyan,” umiling ako.

Binigay na sa ‘kin ‘yung damit. Medyo maliit siya at hapit sa katawan ko pero

okay na rin kaysa wala akong suot pauwi.

“Thank you. Happy birthday, Elisa,” bati ko.

Nagsalubong kaagad ang kilay niya. “What?!”

“Elyse, pre,” bulong ni Arkin sa ‘kin.

“Ah,” natawa ako. Mali pala ‘yon? “Happy birthday, Elyse, pre.”

Mukhang galit pa rin siya sa ‘kin dahil sa panggagago ko. Sige na nga, aayusin

ko na.

“Elyse,” ulit ko. “Happy birthday, Elyse.”

Napakadali niyang inisin dahil halatang pikon siya. Ako naman, gustong gusto

kong namimikon kaya siguro hindi ko siya matigilan. Hindi ko na rin alam kung

bakit. Sa mga tropa kong babae, wala namang madaling pikunin. Si Luna, hindi

ko kayang asar-asarin nang ganoon. Si Yanna, baka suntukin ako kaagad. Sila

Kierra at Via, nang-aasar pabalik at si Sam, masyadong mabait para inisin.

Finollow ko kaagad si Elyse. Ang dali hanapin! Search ko lang sa following

list ni Sam sa Instagram, lumabas na kaagad. Kailangan ko ‘yung coat ko para

sa presentation namin kaya minessage ko siya. Inabot niya naman sa ‘kin

pagkatapos ng laro namin kalaban ang La Salle.

Nakakatawa siya mag-cheer. Parang naririnig kong bulol siya sa ‘r’ kahit hindi

naman. Napapangiti tuloy ako kapag napapatingin ako sa side nila. Halatang

iniiwasan niya ang tingin ko. Noong kumaway ako, hindi niya ‘ko pinansin.

Napakasungit.

“Here are your clothes,” inabot niya sa ‘kin ang paper bag.

“Salamat,” kinuha niya ‘yon mula sa kamay ko. “Uuwi ka na?”

Tinaasan niya ‘ko ng kilay. “Why are you asking again?”

Bakit nga ba? Aayain ko sana siyang kumain dahil noong inaya ko siya mag-

breakfast, iniwan niya ‘ko sa sobrang pikon niya. Bawal nga lang ngayon dahil

kakain kami nila Luna.

“Sevirous! Tara na, aba! Lumalandi ka pa dyan!”

Ayon nga, umepal na nga. Nakikipag-usap pa ‘ko, e! Nagpaalam muna ako kay

Elyse bago ako tumakbo pabalik sa kanila. Lumabas kami ng Arena at inulan ako

ng pang-aasar.

“Crush mo?” Tanong ni Luna sa ‘kin.

“Hindi,” umiling ako. “..pa.”

Hindi pa siguro. Kapag nakasama ko na siya kumain at nakakwentuhan ko na, saka

ko pa lang malalaman kung crush ko ba siya o ano.

“Delete that! I probably looked dumb!” Sinubukan niyang agawin ang phone ko.

“Feeling, hindi naman kasama mukha mo,” tumawa ako.

Sinungaling. Kasama ‘yung mukha niya sa picture na ‘yon. Mukha siyang gulat

pero maganda pa rin naman siya sa picture na ‘yon. Ang cute lang kasi suot

niya ‘yung shirt ko. Cheerleader ng La Salle pero naka-tiger shirt? Poser ‘to.

“Tapos nakakatawa, kasi si Ke..” Napatigil bigla si Luna sa pagkekwento habang

naglalakad kami. “Seb, ‘yun ba ‘yung.. kausap mo last time? ‘Yung crush mo?”

Napatingin kaagad ako sa babaeng naglalakad palayo. Tinawag ko kaagad siya.

“Do you like me?” Matapang na tanong niya sa ‘kin.

Naubo kaagad si Luna at nabulunan siguro sa fishball. Tumatawa pa. Lakas

manggago. Lumingon ako sa kanya at tinignan siya nang masama para tumigil siya

sa kakatawa.

“Sabi mo ayaw mo ng softdrinks at juice, at ayaw mo rin ng service water.

Anong oorderin ko?” Naguguluhan na talaga ako sa babaeng ‘to. Bakit ko nga

ulit inaya kumain ‘to?

Kumain na ‘ko, e!

“You could have bought me a bottled water or something!” Sumimangot siya.

“Walang bottled water.”

“Okay, kapag nabulunan ako at namatay, kasalanan mo!”

Aba, lakas magpa-guilty, ah. Bumuntong-hininga ako at kinuha ang wallet ko

bago naglakad pababa. Lumabas pa ‘ko ng Wendy’s at pumunta sa puking inang

convenience store na laging sira ang aircon at amoy kulob. Kumuha ako ng tubig

sa ref at binayaran sa counter bago ako naglakad pabalik sa Wendy’s. Pagkaupo

ko tuloy, pawis na naman ako.

“Anong course mo?” Tanong ko

“Applied corporate management.”

Luh, tunog mayaman.

Hindi ko alam kung sinasadya ko na mag-iwan ng gamit sa kanya o nakakalimutan

ko lang talaga kuhanin tulad nung linchak na I.D ko. Na-late tuloy ako.

Pumunta pa ‘ko sa ibang gate para makalusot. Tamang takip lang ng bag.

Hinintay ko rin na maraming pumasok sa building para hindi na mapansin kapag

hindi ako nag-tap ng I.D. Napakahirap!

“Eli, breakfast daw kayo sabi ni Sevi!” Sigaw ni Arkin.

“Huh?” Gulat akong napalingon sa kanya.

Gagong ‘to! Anong trip nito? Wala naman akong sinabing ganoon! Sabi niya

magbe-breakfast daw kami at lilibre niya ‘ko, bakit naiba ‘yung usapan?!

Talkshit talaga nito. Mabuti na lang gusto ko rin naman maka-breakfast si

Elyse kaya pabor lang din.

Napakagulo ni Elyse. Ang dami niyang nirereklamo at pinoproblema. Halatang

halata sa kanyang hindi siya mulat sa totoong nangyayari sa lipunan, pero alam

ko namang mabait siya. Kailangan niya lang siguro ng kaunting tulak.

Naguguluhan din ako kung bakit nagagalit na lang siya sa ‘kin bigla! Ano bang

problema nito?

Mabuti na lang.. mahaba pasensya ko.

elydezma: I’m here na. Nakaupo ako sa wooden bench near covered court, katabi

nung yellow na building? Idk.

Â “Camero! Balik dito!” Sigaw ni coach.

Tumakbo kaagad ako pabalik pagkatago ng phone ko sa bag. May pa-meeting ‘tong

si coach ngayon. Hindi ako makapag-focus. Naiisip ko na ‘yung inip na mukha ni

Elyse sa labas dahil sa kakahintay. Pagkatapos tuloy ng training, ako na ang

unang-unang lumabas.

“Madaling madali, ah?!” Sigaw ni Ian.

Bakit nga ba? Hindi naman ako ganito noon, ah. Napailing ako at lumabas na.

“Bakit? Nakakahiya ba ‘ko kasama?” Tanong ko sa kanya.

Hindi siya nakasagot. Umiwas siya ng tingin at hindi na makapagsalita.

Nakaramdam ako ng kirot sa dibdib ko at dahan-dahang tumango. Umalis na lang

ako roon at umuwi.

Ang hirap naman niya abutin.

“Ma, ayoko ngang sumama,” reklamo ko ulit nang inaya niya na naman ako sa

party. Birthday ata ng Daddy ni Elyse. “Dito na lang ako. Manonood ako ng TV o

kaya mag-aaral ako.”

“Hay nako, Sebastian, ha! Napakaano mo!” Pinagalitan na naman niya ‘ko. “Anong

kakainin mo rito, ha?! Doon, libre pa ang pagkain!”

“Eto na nga,” bulong ko at tumayo na para magbihis.

Ayokong pumunta dahil ayokong makita si Elyse.. slight. Mas nangunguna pa rin

ata sa ‘kin ‘yung kagustuhang makita siya. Ang hirap niya talagang layuan.

“Sus,” napailing ako habang pinapanood siyang tumawa-tawa kasama ‘yung lalaki.

Hindi ko gaanong makita dahil nakatalikod sila sa pwesto ko pero naglalaro ata

sila. “Ang saya niya pa, ah. Ayos.”

“Sevi’s graduating without a girlfriend. Be like him, Elyse. Hindi ka pa

pwedeng magka-boyfriend. That’s just a distraction.”

Nasamid ako bigla sa sinabi ng tatay niya. Kakaamin ko lang kanina na crush ko

siya tapos malalaman ko ngayong bawal pa pala siya magka-boyfriend? Awit ‘yon!

Hindi naman sa nagmamadali ako pero ang hirap lang dahil malaki respeto ko sa

tatay niya.

“Pucha, ano ‘yang suot mo?” Tumawa si Via nang makita ako.

“Dalawa sinusuportahan ko, bakit ba?” Tinignan ko ang suot kong La Salle shirt

at black tiger jacket. “Wag ka na mangialam!”

“Hulog na hulog,” umiling si Luna, tumatawa.

“Kinakabahan ka lang kasi baka manonood ex mo ngayon,” ngumisi ako.

Ang ganda ng routines ng mga school, pero ako ata ang kinakabahan para kay

Elyse, e. Hindi ako mapakali sa upuan ko, lalo na noong tinawag na sila.

Halatang kabadong kabado siya.

“Go La Salle!” Sigaw ko.

“Hoy, traydor,” hinatak ako paupo ni Kierra.

Todo cheer pa ‘ko pero nanahimik ako nang biglang mahulog si Elyse sa mat.

Nanlaki ang mga mata ko at napatayo saglit para tignan kung okay lang siya.

Halatang masakit ang binti niya pero ginawa niya pa rin ang stunt. Alalang-

alala na ‘ko at hindi na nakapag-focus sa ibang performance.

“Okay lang ba binti mo?” Tanong ko sa kanya pagkatapos.

Nakita ko kaagad sa mga mata niya ang nagbabadyang luha kaya lumapit ako para

yakapin siya. Hirap na hirap ako para sa kanya nang umiyak siya sa dibdib ko.

Parang pinipiga puso ko. Lahat na ata sinabi ko para tumahan na siya.

“Uy, congrats,” bati ko sa Salinggawi habang yakap ko pa rin si Elyse.

“Bebe mo?” Tumawa si Trisha.

“Oo, eh. Ingat kayo,” tumawa rin ako at kumaway bago sila umalis.

Noong gabing ‘yon, wala naman talaga akong plano i-meet ang Mama niya.

Nagmadali tuloy ako maligo at magbihis. Hindi ko pa alam kung ano ang susuotin

ko.

“Hello po,” bati ko kay Kuya Roel pagkapasok ko ng kotse. “Okay ba suot ko,

Kuya Roel?”

“Pwede na ‘yan, Sir,” tumango siya.

“Mabait ba Mommy ni Elyse? Natatakot kasi ako, e. Wala ka bang tips dyan?”

Tanong ko ulit sa kanya.

“Mabait naman ‘yun, Sir. Wala akong tip. Huwag mong baguhin ang ugali mo dahil

mas gusto niya ‘yung totoong ikaw para mas makilala ka pa niya,” sagot naman

niya sa ‘kin.

“Ah, ayos. Mukhang expert ka, Kuya. Marami ka na sigurong naging jowa,” tumawa

ako.

“Wala nga, Sir,” tumawa rin siya. “Ah, oo nga pala, baka pwedeng hingin ang

number mo, Sir?”

“Ah, bakit Kuya? Crush mo ako?” Pagbibiro ko.

“Pass,” umiling siya. “Para lang alam ko kung nasaan si Ma’am Elyse. Palagi

kayong magkasama, e. Alam ko naman ‘yon.”

Siyempre, binigay ko ang number ko. Sino ba naman ako, diba?! Para alam niya

rin na mapagkakatiwalaan naman ako. Mamaya, isumbong niya pa ‘ko sa Daddy ni

Elyse, e. Yataps ako roon.

“Busog pa ‘ko,” bulong ko kay Elyse.

“You don’t want to eat my food?” Natakot kaagad ako sa Mommy niya.

“Actually, gutom nga po ako. Nagutom ako sa byahe,” ngumiti ako at kumuha ng

pagkain.

Hindi ko inaasahang napakabait ng Mommy niya, kaya siguro mabuti rin ang puso

ni Eli. Kitang kita ko sa kanilang dalawa kung gaano sila kalapit sa

isa’t-isa. Ang saya-saya ni Elyse kapag kasama niya ‘yung Mommy niya. Ang dami

rin nilang pagkakapareho.

“I want a relationship with you.”

Hindi ko alam kung anong mararamdaman ko nang umamin siya sa ‘kin. Parang

gusto ko siyang halikan bigla pero pinigilan ko ang sarili ko. Nasa bahay kami

ng tatay niya. Baka kung anong mangyari sa ‘kin dito. Nakaka-guilty.

“LET’S GO, SEVI! GO UST! HABOL TAYO!”

Tumingin ulit ako sa score at nakita ang lamang ng Ateneo. Napabuntong-hininga

ako, unti-unti nang nawawalan ng pag-asa pero sinusubukan ko pa rin. Si Elyse

na lang pinagkukuhanan ko ng lakas noong panahong ‘yon.

Napatigil ako sa pagtakbo nang marinig ang buzzer. Nag-celebrate kaagad ‘yung

Ateneo. Napangiti ako nang malungkot nang lumapit ang mga teammates ko sa ‘kin

at niyakap ako. Tinapik ko ang balikat nila.

“Sorry, Cap,” bulong pa nung isa.

“Gago, okay lang ‘yon,” tumawa ako. “Huwag na kayong malungkot.”

Nakipag-kamay ako sa mga players ng Ateneo, nakangiti pa ‘ko kahit nanlulumo

na talaga ako. Nanghihinayang lang ako pero wala naman na ‘kong magagawa roon.

“Congrats, p’re,” bati ko.

Pagkatapos, tumingin na ‘ko sa gawi nila Elyse. Ngumiti siya sa ‘kin habang

naglalakad ako palapit. Pumasok ako sa loob at umakyat ng hagdan kung nasaan

siya. Niyakap niya kaagad ako at binaon ko ang mukha ko sa leeg niya.

“I’m still so proud of you,” bulong niya.

Ang sarap at sakit sa pakiramdam. Hindi ko alam ang mararamdaman ko. Iniyak ko

na lang sa kanya lahat. Sa kanya ko lang kaya ibuhos ang nararamdaman ko.

“Shhh, it’s fine. You did your best, baby,” hinaplos niya ang likod ko.

Nang tumigil ako sa kakaiyak, pinakawalan na niya ‘ko at naglakad na rin ako

pabalik. Napahinto ako kasi nakasalubong ko sila Luna na naghihintay sa ‘kin

sa baba.

“Hoy, congrats!” Niyakap ako ni Kierra tsaka ni Via.

“Okay lang ‘yan. Talo ka man dito, panalo ka naman sa lovelife, erp,” sabi sa

‘kin ni Luna kaya natawa ako.

Panalo nga ako roon. Kay Elyse.

“Are you breathing?” Tanong niya sa ‘kin. “Is it hot?”

“Hindi naman,” pinunasan ko ang pawis sa noo ko.

“Then why are you sweating? I think it’s hot,” tumayo siya at kinuha ang

remote ng aircon.

Hindi ako mapakali. Bakit ba kailangan ko pang pumasok dito sa kwarto niya?

Naiilang ako, e. Hindi ko alam ang gagawin ko. Ni hindi ko alam kung paano ako

uupo. Hindi ko alam kung pinagtitripan niya ‘ko o ano noong niyakap niya ‘ko

bigla.

“Have you tried kissing?”

Jusmeyo, mahabagin.

“Oo,” tumango ako sa kanya.

Noong tinanong niya kung sino mga nakahalikan ko, hindi ko alam kung sino

sasabihin ko. Muntik ko nang masabing si Yanna kasi siya ‘yung first kiss ko

noong highschool.

Tangina, nakakadiri, p’re. Ako rin kasi first kiss niya. Siraulong ‘yon,

pinagkakalat pa. Aksidente lang naman ‘yon nangyari. Hindi ko ginusto ‘yun,

‘no!

“Do you want to kiss now?” Tanong niya habang nakakandong sa ‘kin. Nasa

magkabilang side ko ang binti niya at nakahawak siya sa balikat ko.

Puta, hirap na hirap na ‘ko. Ano bang gagawin ko? Ano bang gusto niya?

“I’ll try,” determinadong sabi niya.

Tumango na lang ako. Nilapit niya ang mukha niya sa ‘kin at tinignan pa ang

labi ko bago ako pinatakan ng halik. Halatang wala siyang experience. Hindi

niya alam kung paano. Mukhang kinakabahan pa siya.

“Was that okay?” Tanong niya sa ‘kin na parang bata.

“Okay na ‘yon,” tumango ako.

Oo, okay na ‘yon. Pakawalan mo na ‘ko.

“I’ll do it again!”

Lahat na ata ng santo natawag ko na sa utak ko.

Mas matagal ‘yung halik niya ngayon. “How do I taste like?”

Paano ko malalaman ‘yon?! Hindi ko naman tinikman! Anak ng!

Mukhang nahiya siya at aalis na sana pero hinatak ko siya pabalik at hinawakan

ang mukha niya para ipakita sa kanya kung paano humalik. Nang bitawan ko siya,

namumula na ang pisngi niya.

“We.. Uh.. Haven’t said the three words yet,” nahihiyang sabi niya.

Natawa ako sa isipan ko. Alam ko naman kung anong tinutukoy niya pero mas

nangibabaw sa ‘kin ‘yung kagustuhang asarin siya. Nang mainis na siya, saka ko

lang sinabi.

“I love you,” sambit ko.

Sobra.

Sa bawat taong lumilipas na magkasama kami, parang mas lalo ko lang siyang

minamahal. Hindi ko alam kung paano pa ‘ko makakaahon kapag iniwan niya ‘ko.

Ang lala pero ‘yun ang nararamdaman ko. Lahat ginagawa ko para manatili siya,

pero may mga bagay lang na hindi ko mapigilan.

Kitang kita ko kung gaano siya kapagod sa internship niya, at pagod na rin ako

kaka-review sa boards, pero hindi namin nakakalimutan paalalahanan ang isa't

isang kumain o magpahinga.

Tinanggal ko ang jacket ko at pinatong sa balikat niya habang natutulog siya.

Naiwan pa niyang nakabukas ang laptop niya. Sinara ko ang librong binabasa ko

at dahan-dahang kinuha ang laptop niya para tignan ang ginagawa niya.

"Pahinga ka rin," inalis ko ang buhok na humaharang sa mukha niya.

Imbis na mag-aral, ginawa ko na lang ang presentation niya. Naroon na lahat ng

ilalagay niya, design na lang ang kulang kaya ako na ang gumawa noon. Tumingin

ulit ako sa kanya nang gumalaw siya saglit pero tulog pa rin. Nakalahad na ang

palad niya ngayon sa lamesa. Lumapit ako at hinawakan 'yon.

"Mahal kita," bulong ko.

Araw-araw ata sa trabaho, pagod akong gumigising at pagod akong umuuwi. Ang

hirap pala, lalo na kapag baguhan ka pa lang.

"Bakit?! Sa tingin mo mas magaling ka sa 'kin?!" Sigaw ng head namin.

"No, Sir," sagot ko habang nakayuko. "Sinasabi ko lang po na baka magka-

problema kung gagamitin natin ‘yung materials na naka-”

“Hindi ko hiningi ang opinyon mo, Engineer! Baguhan ka pa lang dito kaya ano

bang alam mo?!” Padabog niyang nilapag ang folder at naglakad paalis.

Napabuntong-hininga ako at minasahe ang sentido ko. Tangina, gustong gusto

kong sumigaw at sumagot pero hindi na lang ako nagsalita. Niligpit ko ang

gamit ko at naglakad na palabas ng kumpanya para mag-commute pauwi.

Napangiti kaagad ako nang makita si Elyse sa sofa ng bahay.

“Hi,” lumapit ako at hinalikan siya sa noo.

At ayun nga, ilang araw pa lang, nagkaproblema na sa site dahil hindi ako

pinakinggan ng head namin. Mas uminit tuloy ang ulo niya sa ‘kin dahil tama

‘yung sinabi ko. Tinatanggap ko na lang lahat ng galit niya. Wala naman akong

karapatang mag-reklamo. Tama naman siya. Mas marunong siya sa ‘kin dahil mas

marami siyang experience.

“Kapag ako naging head, hindi ako magiging ganyan ka-kupal,” bulong ko kay

Theo.

“Resign muna ako tapos kapag ikaw na ang head, balik na ‘ko, okay ba ‘yon?”

Tumatawang sabi niya sa ‘kin.

“Gago, huwag mo ‘ko iwan sa impyernong ‘to,” siniko ko siya. “Sama-sama tayong

babagsak.”

Sobrang saya ko noong nakabili kami ni Elyse ng unit para sa aming dalawa.

Mahal nga lang pero nabigyan naman siya ng discount. Ang dami ko ring ipon

pambili ng gamit at pambayad na rin sa monthly fees.

Ang daming nagbago sa buhay ko noong tumira na kami roon. Kasama ko siya sa

lahat. Pag-gising ko, nandiyan siya. Pag-uwi ko, nandiyan siya. Sabay kaming

nag-gygym at tuwing Sunday, either mananatili kami sa bahay o aalis kami para

mag-date. Kahit kailan, hindi ako na-bore sa buhay ko dahil nandyan si Eli.

“I love you,” niyakap ko siya. “I’ll become more successful.. and then I’ll

marry you.”

‘Yun ang isa sa mga dahilan kung bakit kinakaya kong tiisin ang hirap sa

trabaho. Balang-araw, matatapos din ‘to, aangat din ang posisyon ko, dadami

ang projects ko, at maaalok ko na siya ng kasal.

Ayokong magpakasal hangga’t hindi ko pa kaya.. hangga’t hindi pa namin kaya.

Nakalista na lahat ng pangarap ko at kahit gaano katagal, ayos lang basta

maabot ko lahat ng ‘yon kasama siya.

From: Eli

Hey are you coming home late? I cooked dinner

“Engineer Camero, anak ng! Nagce-cellphone ka pa! Kita mong may problema tayo

rito!” Sigaw na naman ng head namin.

“Sorry, Sir,” tinago ko ang phone ko.

Nagkaproblema na naman sa site. Hindi ko alam kung kami ba ang incompetent o

itong head namin. Ang daming problema kapag siya ang nagha-handle, e, tapos

kami ang sinisisi. Naiinis na ‘ko.

Badtrip na badtrip tuloy akong umuwi. Kakalabas ko pa lang ng elevator, nag-

text na si Mama na tumawag daw ako sa kanya. Importante raw.

“Ma?” Bungad ko.

[Anak, kumusta ka sa trabaho? Malaki na ba ang sweldo mo?] Bungad niya sa

‘kin.

“Okay lang. Nababayaran ko pa naman mga bayarin dito. Bakit?” Naguguluhang

tanong ko. “Ma? Umiiyak ka ba?”

[Sorry, anak.. N-natanggal kasi ako sa trabaho. Hindi ko na alam kung saan ako

kukuha ng pera ngayon. Baka naman pwedeng ikaw na muna ang bahala sa.. sa

tuition ni Steven.. Hindi pa naman ngayon ‘yung bayaran..]

Binuksan ko ang pinto at pumasok sa loob.

“Ma naman, hindi naman kakasya ‘yung sweldo ko kung ganito,” napamasahe ako sa

ulo ko.

Umupo ako sa tabi ni Elyse at napasapo sa noo ko. Ang dami kong iniisip.

“Ano bang ginawa mo? Bakit ka nasisante?” Tanong ko.

[Wala, anak.. Pumalpak lang ako sa trabaho..] Sagot niya.

Napabuntong-hininga ako. Sinabi ko na lang na humanap siya ng bagong trabaho.

Sigurado naman akong mayroon siyang kahit kaunting ipon man lang para

mabayaran ‘yung ibang bayarin sa bahay. Ang dami rin niyang utang.

Tanggap lang ako nang tanggap. Bawat buwan ata, mas tumitindi lang ang pagod

ko. Parang mawawala na ‘ko sa sarili.

“Happy birthday, Kuya,” bati ni Steven sa ‘kin pagdating ko sa bahay.

“Si Mama?” Tanong ko.

“Nasa taas pa ata,” sagot niya naman.

Naglakad ako papunta sa taas at bubuksan na sana ang kwarto nila nang makita

kong lumabas siya sa banyo, umiiyak.

“Ano ‘yang hawak mo?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

“W-wala ‘to, anak,” tinago niya sa likuran niya.

Lumapit ako at sapilitang kinuha ang pregnancy test. Napaawang ang labi ko

habang nakatitig doon. Hindi ko alam ang mararamdaman ko.

“Ma, ano ‘to?” Pinigilan ko ang luha ko.

“Sorry,” umiyak siya sa harapan ko. “Hindi ko.. Hindi ko alam na..”

“Anak ng,” napasabunot ako sa buhok ko at tinalikuran siya. “Sinong ama

nito?!”

Hindi siya nagsalita. Umiling lang siya sa ‘kin at walang balak sabihin.

Padabog kong binalik sa kanya ang pregnancy test bago umalis sa bahay. Hindi

ko na alam ang gagawin ko. Nakailang alak na ‘ko pero hindi pa rin maalis

‘yung problema sa utak ko.

“Putangina, p’re, ang hirap,” reklamo ko kay Theo.

“Pasensya ka na, wala rin akong mabibigay ngayon. Alam mo naman,” bumuntong-

hininga si Theo.

“Hindi, okay lang. Hindi ko naman kailangan,” napamasahe ako sa ulo ko.

“Tangina, kung pwede lang akong maglaho bigla, ginawa ko na kaso..”

“Kaso?” Tanong niya.

“Kaso.. Si Elyse,” bumuntong-hininga ako at umiwas ng tingin. “Hindi ko siya

kayang iwan.”

Unti-unti na siyang nauubos. Bawat araw, nakikita ko sa mga mata niya ang

pagod dahil sa trabaho at dahil sa ‘kin. Tuwing uuwi ako, halata sa kanya ang

kagustuhang makasama ako pero pinipigilan niya ang sarili niya dahil alam

niyang marami akong problema.

At nasasaktan ako tuwing nakikita ko siyang nahihirapan. Halos maubos na ang

gamit niya kakabenta. Gustuhin ko man bayaran ‘yung mga bayarin sa condo,

nauunahan niya ‘ko palagi kaya ‘yung pera ko, binibigay ko na lang kay Mama.

Alam kong isang araw, sasabog na si Elyse at baka iwan niya pa ‘ko. Hindi ako

handa para roon.

Kahit kailan, hindi ako naging handa sa pag-alis niya.

“Let’s.. take a break. We need to take a break,” sabi niya bago siya naglakad

paalis sa ‘kin.

Ilang araw ko siyang hindi nakasama. Doon lang ako tinamaan. Sinubukan kong

ayusin lahat. Bumitaw ako sa mga projects para magkaroon ng oras magpahinga.

Tumanggap ako ng tulong galing kay Sam. Pina-contact ko si Papa kahit labag sa

loob ko.

“What? You had a fight?” Tinaasan ako ng kilay ni Sam pagkaabot sa ‘kin ng

shake.

“Break,” bumuntong-hininga ako. “Ano bang kailangan kong gawin?”

“Maybe you need to loosen up. Look at you. I mean, you can hide your problems

from other people but I’m the master of doing that so I know, okay? If you

need help, I am willing to give,” tinapik niya ‘ko sa balikat.

“May problema lang sa pera,” napailing ako.

“Do you want my help?” Tinignan niya ‘ko. “You can pay me in the future, but I

don’t need it din naman. Ikaw bahala. Whatever helps you sleep at night. I

just don’t want my friends to suffer. It pains me, you know?”

“At paano naman ikaw?” Tinaasan ko siya ng kilay.

“My problems are mine only,” nginitian niya ‘ko. “But thanks for your

concern.”

“Bakit ba ang bait mo?” Tumawa ako. “Mauubos ka nyan, e.”

“Matagal na ‘kong ubos,” umiling siya.

Umuwi siya sa ‘kin. Umuwi ulit siya sa ‘kin kaya nangako ako sa sarili kong

gagawin ko na ang lahat para manatili siya. Lahat ng kulang, pupunan ko. Lahat

ng sobra, babawasan ko.

“Work?” Nagtatampong tanong ni Elyse.

“Si Steven,” kumunot ang noo ko habang nakatingin sa cellphone ko. Lumayo muna

ako kay Elyse para sagutin ang tawag. Alam kong may mali. Hindi naman

tumatawag sa ‘kin si Steven.

[Kuya.. Si Mama.. Kuya!] Umiiyak siya. [May.. May dugo.. Kuya.. W-walang..

Walang..]

Bumilis kaagad ang tibok ng puso ko.

“Ano?! Magsalita ka nang maayos, hindi ko maintindihan!” Sigaw ko.

[Wala siyang malay.. M-may dugo..]

“Anong dugo?! Magsalita ka nang maayos, pucha!” Kinuha ko kaagad ang bag ko

para makaalis.

[Baka ‘yung bata.. Kuya, hindi ko alam gagawin ko. Pumunta ka rito, please..

Hindi ko alam sinong tatawagan ko..]

“Papunta na ‘ko! Humingi ka ng tulong! Huwag mong iiwan si Sofia dyan!” Sigaw

ko bago tumakbo paalis.

Parang nawawala na ‘ko sa sarili ko. Tumawag ulit si Steven para sabihing

sinugod na raw sa hospital si Mama kaya roon ako nagpunta. Huminto ang

ambulansya sa harapan ko at nakita ko na lang ang nanay kong walang malay at

may dugo ang damit. Napaawang ang labi ko at natulala saglit.

“Kuya,” umiiyak si Steven at si Sofia.

“Huwag kayong mag-alala..” Bulong ko, hindi rin alam ang sasabihin. “Okay lang

si Mama..”

Naghintay kami sa tapat ng emergency room. Napamasahe ako sa ulo ko, hindi na

alam ang gagawin. Ni hindi ko na naisip ang gastos sa hospital bills. Gusto ko

lang marinig na okay lang ang nanay ko.

“Anong nangyari?” Tanong ko kay Steven.

“Hindi ko alam.. Nag-CR lang ako tapos paglabas ko sa kusina, nakahiga na

siya. B-baka.. Baka nadulas siya,” hindi siya makapagsalita nang maayos.

“Putangina,” napasabunot ako sa buhok ko.

Napatayo ako nang lumabas ang doktor. “Stable na ang patient, but I’m sorry,

we couldn’t save the child.”

Napaawang ang labi ko. Matagal akong nakatulala sa kanya hanggang sa makaalis

siya sa harapan ko. Bumukas ang pinto ng emergency room at nasa higaan na ang

nanay ko para i-transfer sa maayos na kwarto.

Hindi ako natulog. Hinintay ko siyang magising. Mahigpit ang hawak ko sa kamay

niya, umiiyak.

“Seb..”

Napaangat ang tingin ko kay Mama. Agad akong tumayo at tinawag ang nurse para

matignan siya pero hinawakan niya ang kamay ko. Napabalik ako sa upuan ko.

“‘Yung baby?” Nahihirapang tanong niya.

Tumikhim ako at umiwas ng tingin, hindi alam ang sasabihin sa kanya. Napabalik

ang tingin ko sa kanya nang bigla na lang siyang umiyak. Mahigpit kong

hinawakan ang kamay niya para patahanin siya.

“Sinisante ako sa trabaho nang malaman ni.. ni Alfred na buntis ako,”

pagpapaliwanag niya.

“Ano?” Gulat akong napatingin sa kanya. “B-bakit?”

“May nangyari sa ‘min, Sev,” umiyak siya nang umiyak. “Sorry.. Sorry..”

“P-paano..” Hindi ako makapagsalita. Binitawan ko ang kamay niya at napatayo.

“Paano.. Bakit.. Bakit mo ginawa ‘yon?! Ma?! Tangina.. Tatay siya ng..”

“Tatanggalin niya raw ako sa trabaho kapag hindi ko ginawa ang gusto niya,”

napatakip siya sa mukha niya. “At hindi ko kaya dahil.. Nakikita kong hirap na

hirap ka na sa trabaho.. Ayoko nang dumagdag pa sa-”

“Putangina!” Sigaw ko. Napahilamos ako sa mukha ko, hindi alam kung paano

tatanggapin. “Pinagsamantalahan ka niya?!”

“At pumayag ako,” umiyak ulit siya.

“Hindi ka pumayag, Ma! Tangina, hindi mo gusto ‘yun! Naiintindihan mo?! Hindi

mo kasalanan ‘to!” Tumulo ang luha ko. “Sorry..”

Hindi ko na alam kung anong nangyari. Parang nabulag na ‘ko sa galit at hindi

na nag-dalawang isip sumugod sa kumpanyang ‘yon. Hindi ko na napigilang

kwelyuhan ang lalaking nambastos sa nanay ko.

“Binastos mo nanay ko!” Sigaw ko. “Tao ka pa ba?! Paano mo nagagawang ngumiti

habang.. habang ‘yung.. Mama ko.. nawalan ng anak?”

Napatigil ako nang makita ko ang Mommy ni Elyse na walang malay sa sahig. Nang

sampalin ako ni Elyse, saka lang ako natauhan. Iyon ang unang beses na

sinaktan niya ‘ko.

At ginawa niya ulit.

“My mom died in front of me..” Nanginginig ang mga kamay niya habang umiiyak.

“She.. She died.. in front of me..”

Wala akong ginawa kung hindi humingi ng patawad sa kanya. Wala na rin akong

tulog kakasisi sa sarili ko. Noong nakita kong duguan ang nanay ko, para akong

pinatay.. Kaya alam kong mas malala ang pinagdadaanan niya ngayon. Nawalan

siya ng ina.

Pero bakit nasa akin lahat ng sisi?

“And how are you so sure, huh?!” Sigaw niya. “How are you so sure that your

mom was telling the truth?!”

Napaawang ang labi ko at hindi na nakapagsalita. Hindi ako makapaniwala. Paano

niya.. nasabi ‘yon? Paano niya nakayanang sisihin ang nanay ko?

“You should have killed me instead!” Natigilan ako sa sigaw niya.

“Elyse,” napuno ng pag-aalala ang boses ko.

“Enough,” hinatak na siya ni Ida paalis.

Wala na ‘kong tulog. Paulit-ulit akong humihingi ng tawad sa lahat. Sa nanay

ko dahil hindi ko siya inintindi, kay Elyse dahil nasaktan ko siya, at sa

nanay niya dahil.. Hindi niya ginusto lahat ng ‘to.

“Let me go,” mariing sabi niya.

“Elyse, please, huwag naman ganito..” Pagmamakaawa ko.

Hindi ko kayang makita siyang umalis. Parang nakalimutan ko na lahat ng

problema sa pamilya namin at siya na lang ang iniisip ko. Hindi ko siya kayang

pakawalan. Hindi ngayon. Huwag sana ngayon. Ang hirap.

“Hindi na ‘ko kasama sa mga plano mo?” Napaawang ang labi ko.

“All of you.. All of you are so.. so fucking exhausting,” humikbi siya. “I

want to rest.. I need to rest.. I need to take a break.. Can’t you just give

it to me?”

“Napapagod ka na sa ‘kin?”

Sobrang sakit ng pag-tango niya. Napaiwas ako ng tingin at binitawan siya.

Siguro nga kailangan na naming maghiwalay muna. Mahal ko ang pamilya ko.

Inalala ko ang nanay ko para mamuo ang galit sa ‘kin.. Para kaya ko na siyang

pakawalan.

Hinintay kong makaalis si Elyse bago ako naglakad palapit sa puntod ng nanay

niya. Umupo ako sa monoblock at napatakip sa mga mata ko nang tumulo ang luha

ko.

“Sorry,” iyak ko. “Kung pwede ko lang ibalik.. Kung pwede lang.. Kasalanan ko

‘to.”

Araw-araw, dinadalhan ko ng bulaklak ang nanay niya at araw-araw

pinagsisisihan ko lahat ng ginawa ko. Hindi ako nagsisising sinuntok ko ang

tatay ni Elyse, pero nagsisisi ako sa nangyari sa Mommy niya. Napakabait

niyang tao.

Akala ko roon na matatapos ‘yun. Akala ko pinakawalan ko na siya. Akala ko

kaya ko na pero nang makita ko ulit siya sa harapan ko, parang gusto ko na

lang lumuhod sa kanya at magmakaawang bumalik na siya sa ‘kin.

“Umalis ka na, pinaalis na kita, tapos magpapakita ka rito para sabihing..

aalis ka ulit?” Hindi ko na napigilang umiyak.

“Tell me you’re breaking up with me.”

Tangina.. Paano? Paano ko magagawa ‘yun kung mahal na mahal pa rin kita?

“I do love you,” umiyak siya. “I love you.. but we just can’t be together.”

‘Yun ang masakit. Mahal ko siya at mahal niya ‘ko pero hindi niya kayang manatili dahil hindi kami pwede. Bakit? Kaya kong isantabi lahat para sa kanya. Pagod na ba siya? Pagod na pagod na ba siya sa ‘kin?

“Happy 5th anniversary,” ngumiti siya sa ‘kin.

Hindi ko kayang ngumiti sa kanya pabalik. Hindi ko na napigilan ang iyak ko.

Hindi na ‘ko makapagsalita sa harapan niya.

“Happy 5th anniversary, my love..” For the last time.

Tumulo ang luha niya habang nakangiti sa ‘kin. “Let’s make a wish.”

Pinikit ko ang mga mata ko, hinihiling na sana pagdilat ko, nagbago na ang isip niya.

Pero mukhang malabo.

“Ready?” Tanong niya.

Lumapit ako sa cake para hipan ang kandila. Pinunasan ko ang luha ko.

“You won’t ask where I’m going?” Tanong niya bago umalis.

Umalis ka na.

“Hindi,” umiling ako.

“Why?”

“Baka hanapin kita.”

Baka hindi ko mapigilan ang sarili ko at lumuhod ako sa harapan mo para

humingi ng tawad sa lahat ng nagawa ko.

“Goodbye.”

“Huwag ka nang babalik. Huwag ka nang magpapakita sa ‘kin. Parang awa mo na,”

pagmamakaawa ko bago siya umalis.

Napaluhod ako sa sahig nang narinig ko ang pag-sarado ng pinto. Napatakip ako

sa mukha ko habang umiiyak.

Ang hiniling ko lang ay sana balang araw magkita kami ulit kapag handa na

siya.

At bumalik siya sa ‘kin kapag handa na ako.

.

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“Pasensya na, Elyse. Masyado akong sakim noon.”

I played with the sand using the small stick I was holding. I refused to look

at him. Memories of my mom came back to me. I tried to stop the tears from

falling.

“I had to go to a therapist,” I whispered.

Natigilan siya sa sinabi ko. Nakita kong mabilis siyang napatingin sa ‘kin.

His lips parted, not knowing what to say. I gave him a small smile before

looking away, sighing heavily to calm myself down.

“The impact of.. everything that happened.. It was too much for me to handle,”

I confessed. “I grew up without experiencing any hardship, you know that. My

dad treated me as a princess. Well, he used to. My mom was always there for

me. My brother had a problem with my dad but he was still so nice to me. I

didn’t know how to cope, Sev.”

“I.. I’m sorry,” he still didn’t know what to say.

It was fine. I wasn’t expecting him to say anything. Sapat na sa ‘king

napapakinggan niya ‘ko. I wanted him to hear my side. I left not because I got

tired of him. I left so I could find another reason to live.

“I loved my dad so much,” I covered my face with my shaking hands when my

tears started to fall. “And it turned out that he wasn’t who I thought I

knew..”

“Alam kong mahal mo siya, Elyse,” tumango siya.

“I loved him, and all of a sudden, it was gone,” I bit my lower lip. “It was

so hard to turn your back against the person you loved for years. I had trust

issues, the reason why I.. I couldn’t make friends anymore. I had Ida, though.

I was glad I still had Ida.”

“I’m-”

“No, don’t say sorry, please. Stop blaming yourself for the things that are

totally out of your control. The only person I can blame right now is my

father,” I looked at the sea to calm myself down. “I can’t even look at him

anymore.”

“Balita ko nasa hospital siya,” tumikhim siya.

“Yeah. That was the last news I heard about him,” I shrugged.

“Hindi mo siya pinupuntahan?” Kumunot ang noo niya at tumingin sa ‘kin. “Paano

kapag nawala na siya-”

“Then that’s better,” I hissed. Humigpit ang hawak ko sa stick.

He looked like he wanted to lecture me or something. “Elyse-”

“Don’t, Sebastian,” I cut him off. “Do not go there. I don’t want to deal with

that matter right now.”

“Pero..” He still wanted to say something but stopped.

“You should hate him, you know?” I scoffed. “He ruined everything. Good thing

your.. Y-your mom got her justice.. Right?”

I couldn’t even say the name of his mom. Guilt slowly spread inside me. How

could I present myself again in front of Sevi’s mom? Would she accept me? I

was scared. Sana nabawasan ang galit niya sa pamilya ko noong tinulungan sila

ni Kuya sa kaso.

“Pagod na ‘kong mag-tanim ng galit,” he sighed.

Sevi had the softest heart. Kung ako sa kanya, kahit kailan, hindi ko

magagawang magpatawad. It was too much. My dad was too much. He was a

manipulative sick bastard. A cheater. A monster. What a shame that I had to

bring his surname with me.

“Umuulan na,” Sevi stood up and offered his hand.

The rain poured but I was still sitting on the sand like I had all the time in

the world. I stared at the sea. The sound of waves started to get louder,

along with the rain. I looked at Sevi who had his hand over my head, kahit

siya ang nababasa na.

“You’re so selfless,” I whispered.

“Ano?” He didn’t hear what I said.

“Nothing,” I held his hand and stood up. “Let’s go. You might get sick. You

look like you barely even slept.”

He didn’t talk. He let go of my hand and gestured me to go first. I started

running until we reached his office. Hindi ako masyadong nabasa pero siya,

mukhang sinalo niya lahat ng ulan dahil basa ang polo. He got his towel out to

wipe himself.

“You’re staying here, right?” I asked, getting my car keys inside my bag.

“Oo,” he looked away. “Uuwi rin ako bukas.”

“Okay,” I nodded, ready to leave.

“Ikaw? Kailan ka uuwi?” He asked, which made me stop.

The idea of home, for me, was him. It was probably the same with him.. Or not?

Umuuwi ako sa mansion only to feel lonely and empty. Mas okay pa ‘ko sa condo

ni Ida but it was still not the same with Sevi.

“Do you want me there?” I looked at him.

“Ah! Magkakasakit ata ako,” maarte niyang hinawakan ang leeg niya. “Hindi pa

naman ako masyadong kumakain at natutulog. Feeling ko magkakasakit talaga

ako,” he even closed his eyes and acted weak.

“Oh my, really?” I acted worried about him. “Maybe you need medicine. Stop

flirting. I’m going now.”

“Hindi ko kaya,” he sat on his swivel chair, still acting weak.

“Fine, I’ll go home tomorrow. I’ll just get my things,” I chuckled. “I’ll see you. Don’t get sick, okay?”

Mabuti na lang humina ang ulan kaya tumakbo na lang ako papunta sa car ko. I

felt a little cold because of the rain but my heart felt warm. Pagkarating ko tuloy sa condo ni Ida, tinaasan niya ‘ko ng kilay. I sat beside her and suddenly hugged her.

“Hey, why? Is there something wrong?” She asked, holding my shoulders.

“Thanks for staying with me,” I tightened my hug.

“Hey, why are you suddenly being cheesy?!” She laughed. “I’m not used to this!

Nasaan si Elyse?! Ibalik n’yo! My gosh!”

“You know what? Panira ka,” tumawa ako at binitawan siya.

“Love you!” She shouted before I went inside the guest room.

I went to the shower and did my night care routine before getting my things and putting them back inside the luggage. After that, I laid down on the bed, staring at my phone, waiting for his text. What? Hindi man lang ba niya ‘ko itetext? I thought we were improving na?

I had to do something to get his attention. I stood up and applied lip tint. I

also curled my eyelashes before going back to the bed. I pulled my nighties down so it would reveal my cleavage a bit. I angled my face before taking a selfie on Instagram.

“Ugh, it’s ugly,” I clicked the exit button so I could re-take it again.

I parted my lips and looked at the camera habang nakahiga sa kama. It came out perfect. I bit my lower lip to stop myself from smiling. I added the photo on my IG story and captioned it ‘Not sleepy yet’.

I made squealing noises on the bed out of embarrassment. I can’t believe I just posted a thirst trap for him to contact me! Kinuha ko ulit ang phone ko at paulit-ulit na ni-refresh ang DMs ko. Paulit-ulit ko rin chineck kung na-view na niya.

“Omg,” I whispered when I saw his name on the people who viewed my story. I waited for his message but it did not come! Hindi na rin siya online!

So annoying naman! Sumimangot ako at tinabi na lang ang phone sa side table. I crossed my arms over my chest as I glared at the ceiling. Lahat ng inis ko, sa kisame ko na lang binubuhos. I pointed at it and cursed it.

I stopped when I heard a notification on my phone. Inabot ko kaagad ang phone

ko at nalaglag pa sa kama. I held my back to massage it. Ang sakit, ah!

sevirous replied to your story

“Ah! Oh my gosh,” umakyat kaagad ako sa kama at humiga bago buksan ‘yung

message niya.

sevirous: Ano ‘yan, bold? Kung bold ‘yan hindi ako interesado

Napawi ang ngiti ko. Napalitan ng inis. I rolled my eyes before typing a

reply.

elydezma: If you’re not interested then why did you reply to my story huh?

Just admit that you felt butterflies in your tummy when you saw my photo

sevirous: Tulog ka na lang sis

See?! Walang kwenta ang replies niya!

elydezma: Hbu? You’re still awake

sevirous: Hindi ako makatulog, e. Ikaw matulog ka na huwag mo na ‘ko masyadong

isipin.

I scoffed in disbelief. What the hell did he just say? Ang kapal naman ng

mukha niya! How did he know?!

elydezma: K. Good night.

sevirous: gunayt bibe

Napakunot ang noo ko. What? Did I read it right? I was about to reply but he

sent a picture. Agad nag-init ang ulo ko nang makita ang picture ng duck!

I rolled my eyes before turning my phone off. Natulog na lang ako. Sevi really

knew how to piss me off even though he was kilometers away from me. A special

talent, I guess.

I woke up early in the morning to go to work. I went out of the room and saw

Ida preparing breakfast in the kitchen. Umakyat kaagad ako sa mataas na upuan

at nagpahalumbaba, hinihintay siya. She placed the fried egg and bacon in

front of me, together with toasted bread.

“I’m going back to the unit today,” I informed her.

“Ayan! D’yan kayo magaling. Pagkatapos ninyong makinabang, aalis kayo!” She

dramatically said before laughing. “Kapag bati na sa jowa, iiwan na ulit ang

friend!”

“Hey! Are you serious?” I suddenly felt guilty. “I’m sorry! Why don’t we go

out for drinks tonight? Babawi ako!”

“I was just kidding but yes! Sabi mo ‘yan, ah,” she winked at me.

I just wore a red turtle-neck and a white two-piece suit to work. Magpapalit

na lang ako mamaya since 10 PM pa naman kami magcu-club ni Ida. I also called

Sam so she can reserve us a couch. Medyo natagalan bago niya nasagot ang

tawag.

[Heyyy, Elyse!] Her voice was extra high-pitched. Napakunot tuloy ang noo ko.

“Hey,” maingat na sabi ko. “Did I disturb you? I’m sorry I was calling so

early in the morning-”

[Oh, no! No!] She sounded like she was walking out so fast. I heard her

panting. [What’s up? Is there a problem?]

“No, no problem. I was just wondering if you could reserve me a couch later?

My friend and I are planning to go out for a drink. I could pay-”

[No need to pay! Come on! Wait lang, Eli.. Hey, stop! Later na, okay?!] I

raised my brows when she suddenly yelled at someone. I felt like I was

disturbing.. something.

“I can just.. Uhm, text, I guess?” I suggested.

[I’m so sorry, Eli. Yeah, sure! You can text me na lang! I’ll see you later!]

And then she ended the call.

I just texted her the information before going back to work. I went out for a

random inspection and also ate my lunch at the hotel before going back to my

office. I just attended a meeting before I left the company. I was excited to

leave. Gustong gusto ko na mag-party! Promise, hindi na ‘ko malalasing like

what happened last time!

I pulled my luggage inside the unit. Sevi wasn’t there yet so I cooked dinner

just to waste my time. It was around 7 PM when I heard someone fumbling with

his keys outside. Hindi na ‘ko nagulat nang buksan ni Sevi ang pinto habang

naghahain ako ng pagkain.

“You’re late,” I rolled my eyes.

“Huh? May curfew na?” He raised a brow after closing the door.

Hindi ko siya sinagot at umupo na lang para kumain. He placed his things

inside the study room before sitting in front of me so we could eat together.

I kept on glancing on the clock. Binilisan ko ang kain ko.

“Nagmamadali ka ba?” Sevi’s brows furrowed.

“I’m going out tonight,” I sipped on my water.

“Sinong kasama mo?” Seryosong tanong niya.

“Ida,” I stood up after eating. “I cooked so you’ll wash the dishes, okay?!”

“Hoy-” He stopped when I went inside the bathroom to take a shower.

I showered for 20 minutes and then blow-dried my hair inside the walk-in closet. Sevi was outside, washing the dishes. I decided to wear a black halter neck dress that hugged my body perfectly. I partnered it with silver heels and black pouch. I tied my hair in a ponytail and put on a pair of earrings before going out.

“Aalis ka na?” Sevi was in the living room. Mukhang hinihintay niya ‘ko.

“Yes. I might be home late,” I nodded, fixing my earrings a bit. My brows furrowed when I noticed that he was wearing a sweater and a pair of sweatpants. It wasn’t even cold. “Are you okay?”

“Oo naman,” he said.

“Are you sick?” I walked towards him but he stood up to get far away from me.

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“Sige na. Umalis ka na. Late ka na, oh,” he pointed at the clock. He was hugging a pillow. Parang bata lang. “Enjoy!”

“I’ll be back,” I slowly walked away.

I booked a grab on my way to the club. I didn’t want to drive. Baka hindi ko na naman mauwi ang kotse ko mamaya. I’ll just book another ride home.

Pagkarating ko roon, nakita ko na kaagad si Ida. She was talking to a guy. She

was wearing a silver spaghetti strap dress. Her hair was in soft curls.

“Girls! Girls!” Lumingon kaagad ako kay Sam. She was wearing a maroon fitted

dress. Kinalabit ko si Ida at hinatak palapit kay Sam. “Hi! I was talking to

someone lang tapos nakita ko si Eli. Sakto!”

“Ida, this is Sam,” I introduced.

“Yeah, we know each other,” Ida laughed.

Oh, right. Okay. Hindi ko na tatanungin kung paano sila nagkakilala. Sam had

her own ways. She probably knew everyone. Kapag tumakbo siyang mayor, mananalo

siguro siya.

“Let’s go!” Sam clung on my arm before pulling me inside. Ni hindi na kami

dumaan sa bouncer at sa counter. She immediately pulled us inside.

Narinig ko na kaagad ang malakas na tugtog at naamoy ang alak at cigarette.

Sam stopped in front of a small couch. A ‘RESERVED’ sign was placed on the

table so people won’t take it. Umupo kami ni Ida habang abala si Sam sa

pakikipag-usap sa waiter.

“Hindi kaya nalulugi si Sam sa dami ng kaibigang nililibre niya ng couch?” Ida

asked, laughing.

“She’s rich,” I shrugged. “And we will pay for it, don’t worry.”

“I’m so sorry I can’t be with you the whole night, girls! Medyo busy,” Sam

giggled. Hindi niya pa natatapos ang sentence niya, may kumakaway na sa kanya.

“Enjoy!” She said before walking away to greet another person.

“It’s you and me,” Ida wiggled her brows on me.

“Oh gosh,” I shook my head, getting nervous now.

May five bottles sa table namin and lahat ‘yon balak ubusin ni Ida nang kami

lang dalawa! Tinitignan ko pa lang, nasusuka na ‘ko! I took 5 shots of

tequila. Sunod-sunod. Ida wanted it that way.

“Fuck, this tastes so bad,” I whispered after drinking another shot.

“Come on! You can do it!” Ida cheered for me. “Cheers!”

I drank another 5 shots and stood up to go to the dance floor. Ida was going

around holding two bottles so she can pour them over some random person’s

mouth. I danced with the two girls I met. Nakalimutan ko na kaagad ang

pangalan nila.

Ida and I finished two more bottles until I almost passed out. I went to the

restroom to vomit so I felt better.

“Hey, are you okay?” Ida was also drunk.

“I need to go home na,” I giggled kahit walang nakakatawa.

Tumayo ako at muntik nang matumba kaya napahawak ako sa cubicle. The door was

open so nasubsob ako ulit sa loob. Ida laughed at me before helping me get up.

I washed my hands before slapping myself repeatedly. I wanted to get back to

my senses.

“Oh my gosh, I need to go home naaa, riiight?” I asked Ida. My voice sounded

so drunk.

“Yes! Yes! Let’s go! Let’s book you a ride!” Ida put her hand on my shoulder

before pulling me outside. She stopped when she accidentally bumped onto Sam.

“Hey heyy!”

“Hey!” Nanlaki ang mata ni Sam nang makita ako. “Oh my gosh, is she okay?”

“Of course she’s okay!” Ida answered for me.

I fell on the floor again. Both of them tried to help me out.

“Or not,” Ida laughed.

“Damn, Sevi will kill me,” Sam whispered, putting my arms around her. “Elyse,

drink water, okay? I can’t let you go home like this! Your hubby will kill

me!”

“What hubby?” I sat on the couch, closing my eyes.

Sam sat beside me and made me drink water. Nabasa na ‘yung dress ko dahil ang

likot ko. I tried to drink a lot of water but I ended up running again inside

the restroom to vomit. Sam looked so stressed. Ida was drunk too so she just

kept on laughing.

“Let’s go,” Sam helped me up again. I almost slipped on my heels. “Oh God, do

you need a wheel chair or what?”

“She’s fine!” Ida pulled me up again.

Sam was already talking to someone on the phone. “Hey, your girl right here is

wasted as he-”

“Oh no! Don’t tell him!” Inagaw ko ang phone ni Sam at pinatay ang tawag.

“He’s.. He’s sick! I think he’s sick! I can go home! I’ll go home na!”

I walked back to the couch and tried to get my things. Ida was already talking

to a random guy. My eyes widened when they started making out. What the hell!

I stood up and pulled her away from that guy.

“Okay, enough for the both of you. I’ll ask someone to take you home. Wait here, okay?” Sam massaged her head before leaving.

I pouted and waited on the couch like an obedient puppy. Ida wanted so bad to make out with the guy but I just couldn’t leave her alone! Baka kung ano pang mangyari sa kanya! At least I was still a little responsible even though I was drunk. My head was really spinning.

In just a few minutes, Sam was already pulling a guy.

“Hala, anong nangyari dyan?” The guy pointed at us.

“Favor lang, Adi, please,” Sam pouted. “I can’t go right now. I need to take care of something. You didn’t drink naman, right?”

“Hindi ba ‘yan susuka sa kotse ko?!” Reklamo nung lalaki.

I closed my eyes. My head was spinning. I could barely hear them talking.

Dumilat lang ako nang hawakan nung lalaki ‘yung braso ko at hinatak ako patayo. Sam helped Ida up and then we walked out of the club.

“Hindi kaya patay na ‘to, Sam?” The guy laughed after putting on my seatbelt.

“Boracay?! Of course I’m in!” Sam was busy talking to someone on the phone.

“When ba? Tomorrow na agad? Wait lang.. Adi, I’ll go na! Take care of them,

ah! I texted you the address!”

“Hoy, Samantha! Shit!” The guy tried to call Sam. He looked defeated. “Ayan,

sige! Inom pa! Inom inom kayo tapos malalasing kayo, wala namang mag-aalaga sa

inyo!”

“Fuck you, bro! Stop talking!” I raised my middle finger at him while my eyes

were still closed.

“Aba! Ako na nga nagmamagandang-loob dito,” he answered back before starting

the engine. Ida was at the backseat, still conscious.

“Hey you! Don’t you ever lay hands on my best friend!” I opened my eyes to

glare at him.

“What do you think of me, bro? Manyakis?! Ka-offend, ah,” he shook his head

while driving.

“Why? Mamaya type mo siya!” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“May girlfriend ako, oy,” he shook his head. “Artista!”

I rolled my eyes and tried to sleep again. Nagising na lang ako nang nasa

tapat na ‘ko ng lobby ng condo. I felt a little better now. I took my seatbelt off before opening the door.

“Thanks. If you do anything to my friend, I will sue you! My brother is a prosecutor, bitch!” I threatened him.

“Ahuh?” He raised a brow. “I’m a lawyer.”

“Oh,” I shrugged before going out of the car. “Take care of her! Bye!”

I closed my eyes and leaned my head against the elevator when it started going up. I checked twice if I clicked the right button. Mamaya kung saan ako mapunta, e!

“Ding!” I giggled when the elevator opened.

I tried so hard to walk straight. I stopped in front of the unit and fumbled with my keys. I had to put the key into the door handle twice because it wouldn’t go in! I sighed when I opened it and went inside. Dimmed na ang lights sa living room so Sevi was probably already sleeping.

I took my heels off and went inside the bedroom only to see Sevi sleeping. He was covering himself with a blanket. I thought he was sleeping but he suddenly started coughing. I sat beside him and turned the lamp on.

“Heyyy, you okayy?” I slapped his cheek lightly. When he didn’t respond, I

slapped it again. I hoped it didn’t hurt.

“Aray ko,” he opened his eyes. His brows were already furrowed.

“Are you sick?” I put my hand on his forehead. “Oh no, you’re sick. Wait, I’ll

get you something!”

I stood up and went out of the room, gumegewang pa ang lakad. I made a mess in

the kitchen, trying to find a bowl. I put cold water on it and slowly walked

back to the bedroom. Natapon-tapon na ang tubig sa bowl because of my unstable

walk.

“Ugh! I have to get another one tuloy!” Reklamo ko nang maubos na ang tubig.

“Elyse, matulog ka na lang,” Sevi massaged his head.

“I can do this, okay?!” I went inside the bathroom to get water again. Pinuno

ko ulit ang bowl until it was already overflowing.

Bumalik na ulit ako sa kwarto, dahan-dahang naglalakad. I was so careful with

the bowl until natisod ako sa sariling paa.

“Ouch!” I suddenly fell on the floor. “Hala!” I covered my mouth in shock.

It was flooding! Inside the bedroom!

“Anak ng tupa,” Sevi whispered, forcing himself to get out of the bed.

“I can clean this! Promise!” I stood up again. My dress was all wet now.

“Huwag na- Hoy!” Sevi tried to stop me.

Kinuha ko ang mop at naglakad pabalik sa kwarto. Sevi tried to get it from me

but I told him to just sit down! He was sick! I tried to mop the floor like

Cinderella.. but why was it getting messier?!

“Ako na, ako na,” Sevi sighed, getting the mop from my hands.

“I just.. I just wanted to give you something to drink,” I pointed on the

bowl.

“Hah,” he scoffed in disbelief. “Akala ko pa naman pupunasan mo ‘ko. Inumin ko

pala ‘yon?”

“Yes, why?” I blinked twice, not getting his confusion.

“Ano ako, aso?” He shook his head while mopping the floor.

I laid down on the bed. Pagod na ‘ko at ang sakit na ng paa ko dahil sa heels.

My dress already went up, revealing my panties. Sevi glanced at it but

immediately looked away. Umayos ako ng upo at hinatak pababa ang dress ko. I

was conservative, ‘no!

“Baby, can you kiss me please?” I gave him a cute smile.

“H-huh?” Sevi acted like he didn’t hear anything.

“I miss you na, ugh,” humiga ulit ako sa kama. Nahilo na naman ako. “You know

what? I haven’t had sex for almost 4 years na! Am I dying?!”

“Elyse, matulog ka na,” Sevi went out of the bedroom to put the mop back.

I pouted and stared at the ceiling, waiting for him to come back. Napatingin

ako sa kanya nang huminto siya sa harapan ko at sinubukan akong hatakin paupo.

“Paano ka umuwi?” He asked.

“Oh, a guy took me home,” I giggled.

Binitawan niya ‘ko bigla kaya napahiga ulit ako sa kama. Kumunot ang noo ko at

sinipa siya. What the hell! Nahilo tuloy ako bigla!

“Sino?” He sounded mad.

“I don’t know! Sam’s friend!” I tried to sit down but I was struggling. “A

little help here, please?”

Hinatak niya ulit ang kamay ko paupo. I sighed and stood up to go inside the

bathroom. Susunod sana si Sevi pero sinarhan ko siya ng pinto. What? I can

wash myself, you know! I just needed to take my clothes off, get into the

shower, wet myself with water, and then apply soap and shampoo, and then wash

myself again, and then done!

That was what I did. Muntik nga lang ako makatulog sa shower. Sinuot ko ang

robe ko pagkatapos, and then I brushed my teeth. I also applied cleanser on my

face and washed it off before going out. Sevi was already sitting at the edge

of the bed, talking to someone on the phone.

“Bakit ganito? Sino nag-uwi rito? Kilala mo raw?” Sevi looked so stressed out.

“Ah, si Adonis. Oo, nandito na. Lasing na lasing, amp.”

“Hey, are you talking about me, huh?!” I pouted before going to the bed, still

wearing my robe.

“Oo, nilalagnat lang ako pero uminom na ‘ko ng gamot,” he ignored me. “Ingat

kayo bukas. Sige na, Sam. Bye.”

I closed my eyes and tried to hug a pillow. I heard Sevi leaving the room.

Akala ko hindi na siya babalik pero nakita ko na lang siya bigla sa harapan

ko.

“Basa ‘yung robe mo. Magpalit ka nga,” Sevi placed my clothes on the side

table.

“Dress me up,” I playfully winked at him.

“Hoy, hindi ako nakikipaglaro sa ‘yo, ah,” he pursed his lips. “Tumayo ka

diyan.”

“Okay, daddy,” I giggled.

Napamasahe siya sa sentido niya pagkatayo ko. Muntik pa ‘kong matumba kaya

hinawakan niya ang braso ko. I gave him a cute smile before getting my clothes

on the side table. I pulled on my robe and took it off to put my clothes on.

“Hoy! Hindi rito! Sa C.R ka magbihis!” Sevi suddenly turned his back against

me, covering his eyes.

“Oh, come on! You saw it na!”

I rolled my eyes while I was putting on my underwear. I refused to wear a bra.

Sinuot ko na lang ang pajamas ko at binutones ang pang-taas bago humiga ulit

sa kama. Lumingon na siya sa ‘kin nang wala na siyang narinig na ingay.

“Why don’t we start sleeping next to each other, huh?” I asked, tapping the

space beside me.

“Baka mahawa ka. Sa study room na ‘ko,” he shook his head. “Matulog ka na.”

“Please? Please?” I pouted.

He sighed heavily before slowly laying down beside me. Inayos niya ang higa

niya at kinuha ang comforter para kumutan ako at ang sarili niya. I faced him

while he was facing the ceiling, feeling awkward.

“Do you miss me?” I asked.

He didn’t answer. He just swallowed hard, refusing to look at me.

“I miss your hands on my boobs,” I whispered on him.

Napatingin kaagad siya sa ‘kin, nakakunot ang noo. I laughed at his reaction.

Oh my gosh, he looked confused. It was funny.

“Anong trip mo? Matulog ka na nga,” umusog siya palayo sa ‘kin, like I was a

dangerous creature!

“I was just kidding,” I laughed again.

We were filled again with silence. We were both staring at the ceiling,

thinking about different things. I was thinking of something to say. Ngayon ko

lang gustong sabihin lahat ng naiisip ko. It was the alcohol speaking for me.

“I miss you so much,” I whispered before dozing off to sleep.

I woke up around noon. Medyo masakit ang ulo ko pagkadilat ko. Good thing it

was Sunday so walang work. I stood up and went out of the room, only to find

Sevi preparing food. Tinaasan niya ‘ko ng kilay nang umupo ako sa dining,

inaantok pa.

“Sige, inom pa. Inom lang nang inom hanggang sa masira ang atay,” pagpaparinig

niya habang nagluluto. “Sa susunod, si St. Peter na susundo sa ‘yo.”

“You’re so O.A ha!” Inismiran ko siya. “Hey, are you feeling okay na?”

“Oo, uminom na ‘ko ng gamot,” he answered. “Ikaw? Masakit ulo mo?”

“Yes,” I pouted.

“Tanggalin mo,” walang kwentang sagot niya.

Napasimangot kaagad ako. Gusto ko siyang batuhin ng plato!

“Are you mad at me, huh?! Why are you being so sarcastic?!” Reklamo ko sa

kanya.

Hindi siya sumagot. Naghain na lang siya ng ulam tsaka kanin. I refused to eat

rice. It wasn’t part of my diet. Ulam lang ang kinain ko. He opened the fridge

and placed two slices of cake on the table. I bit my lower lip and looked at

him.

“Where did the other slices go?” I asked.

“E ‘di pinakain ko sa site. Bakit?” He raised a brow. “Mabuti nga nag-tira pa

kami para sa ‘yo, e. Happy birthday, ah.”

“Where’s my gift?” Nilahad ko ang kamay ko.

“Wala, tinapon ko na,” he shrugged.

“What?!” Binitawan ko ang kutsara. I crossed my arms over my chest and glared

at him. “Get me another one! How dare you throw it out?! You should have just

kept it for two weeks, I guess? What did you do to it?”

“Sinangla ko,” the side of his lips rose.

“What? Anong gift mo?” My brows furrowed in confusion.

He sipped on his water and raised a brow, refusing to answer my question.

Padabog kong niligpit ang pinagkainan ko at nilagay sa sink. I heard him

chuckle while I was washing the dishes, nang-aasar.

“What is it nga?” I stopped in front of the television while he was watching a

movie.

“Oy, umalis ka diyan,” sinubukan niyang sumilip sa TV pero hinarang ko rin

pati kamay ko. “Anak ng! Parang bata ‘to!”

“What is it?!” I crossed my hands over my chest.

He massaged his head and sighed heavily before looking at me. I raised my

brows at him, waiting for his answer.

“Singsing,” he pursed his lips and looked away.

:)

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“He didn’t say what kind of ring. Ang sabi niya lang singsing. Basta

singsing!”

I was complaining to Ida about the ring. It was already Friday. Ngayon lang

kami nagkita ulit noong pinuntahan niya ‘ko sa office ko. Sevi didn’t give any

more context about the gift. Ring lang! Tapos wala na! What? Is this a game,

huh? Hulaan ba ‘to?

“You’re expecting na engagement ring?” Ida laughed at me.

“Well, what else?!” I rolled my eyes while reading something on my laptop.

Hindi rin naman ako makapag-focus sa trabaho ko.

“So ‘yung ring na bigay sa ‘yo ni Austin, you’re expecting din na engagement

ring ‘yon?” Ida raised a brow.

“Of course not!” My brows furrowed, looking disgusted.

“See?! Malay mo for fashion lang or something. Don’t expect too much! Besides,

hindi pa nga kayo nagkakabalikan. Why would he immediately ask you to marry

him?” Ida sipped on her tea. “I mean, I know you would say yes agad but-”

“Hey, stop judging me!” I pouted.

She was right, though! Ganoon ako ka-rupok kay Sevi! I mean, there was no

point in playing hard-to-get. I didn’t like wasting time. I’m a businesswoman

and I value time the most, but Ida was also right on the part that Sevi and I

were still.. adjusting. Hindi na kami ‘yung noon. A lot already changed.

“Elyse, here’s your lunch,” Austin went inside my office, holding two

containers. Si Alice ang nagbibigay sa ‘kin n’on dati pero ngayon, si Austin

na ang kumukuha sa lobby.

Ida glanced at him and raised a brow. Inismiran siya ni Austin at nilagay ang

containers sa table ko. He even opened them for me para sabihing kumain na ‘ko

kaagad. I closed my laptop and got my utensils out of the drawer. Nakita ko

bigla roon ang velvet box kaya kinuha ko ‘yon at nilapag sa harapan niya.

“Why?” Austin’s brows furrowed.

“I’m sorry, I can’t take this,” I gave him a small smile. “I don’t want others

to get the wrong idea-”

“What is the wrong idea, Elyse?” He was slowly getting mad. “I gave it to you

as a gift. Who cares about what others would think? Kung iisipin nila na

magka-relasyon tayo, wala naman akong pakialam-”

“But I care,” I cut him off. “Because this is not good for me.”

“Why is it not good for you?” He complained. “I am the son of the Chairman.

You’re the C.E.O and the owner of the company. We run the company together.

Wala namang mawawala sa ‘yo, ah.”

“What are you implying here?” I raised a brow. “I just don’t want to spread

false rumors about us. It’s not good for the both of us.”

“You’re single, right?” He sounded hopeful.

“I.. Uh,” I bit my lower lip. I didn’t know how to answer that. “Yes, I am,

but-”

“Then I can still court you,” Austin shrugged and slid the velvet box back to

me. “It’s yours. You can wear it or not, but it’s yours. Don’t give it back to

me.”

“Why are you being so pushy?” Ida raised a brow. Napatingin kami ni Austin sa

kanya.

“You’re out of the conversation,” Austin glared at her.

“You’re so pushy. I’m starting to think that you have other intentions for

bringing up your positions in the company, but I might be wrong.. Right?” Ida

gave him a sweet smile.

“You are,” Austin hissed. “I don’t have any other intention. I just want the

best for this company.”

“Why does it matter?” Kumunot ang noo ni Ida. “You want a relationship with

her, and then you will say that you just want the best for this company. What

is the connection? How is it relevant?”

“You’re getting the wrong idea right here, Fraida,” Austin sounded mad.

“Enough for the both of you, please,” I massaged the bridge of my nose.

“Austin, you can go.”

They were stressing me out. Wala naman akong pakialam kung ano ang intensyon

niya. Regardless, I still wouldn’t give him a chance. Ida shrugged and sipped

on her tea, looking like she just achieved something.

“You need to be careful with that guy,” Ida reminded me.

“We’ve been friends for years. He hasn’t done anything beyond the line yet so

give him the benefit of the doubt,” I told her.

“Yet,” she repeated. “Babe, I’m a businesswoman and I know how big companies

work. You need to be extra careful with the people you trust here. Who knows

how many of them would want to steal this company from you? Makes you think,

huh?”

“I don’t trust people, too,” I whispered. “They can plot something behind my

back and I would welcome them with a knife in front. Don’t worry. I can

manage.”

“Well, it’s your company,” she shrugged.

I set that aside and just continued eating. It was around 5 PM when Ida and I

decided to go shopping. We went to the nearest high-end mall to look for

designer clothes and bags. I was starting to run out of work attires.

To: Sevi

Going home late. Ida and I are going to have dinner together

Baka magluto na naman siya ng dinner tapos magrereklamo siya kasi hindi ko

kakainin dahil busog ako! I also went home late yesterday and he welcomed me

with a glare. So scary!

From: Sevi

Penge aq hehe

Napairap ako bago tinawag ang waiter para mag-order ng take-out. Tatlong pagkain pa ‘yun! Pasta, wings, and pizza. Magsawa siya sa pagkain.

“Must be nice to go home to someone,” Ida pouted, getting jealous.

“You want me to find you a boyfriend? I know a lot of single guys. Wait, let me check my following list on Instagram,” I took my phone out again.

“No, I don’t need a man in my life,” Ida rolled her eyes. “That’s tiring. Inggit lang ako minsan but I prefer to be single, you know.”

“Okay,” I shrugged. “That’s good for you. It’s so hard to maintain a relationship and if it doesn’t go well, may bonus pang heartbreak.”

“Yikes,” Ida shook her head. “I don’t want that. The only heartbreak I can deal with is when my favorite product is already out of stock, or kapag may crack sa makeup ko.”

9 PM na ‘ko nakauwi sa condo, dala-dala ‘yung pagkain ni Sevi. Nilapag ko kaagad sa dining table pagkapasok. Sevi was working inside the study room when

I opened the door. He was also on the phone with someone.

“Oo, chineck ko na ‘yung materials para sa Rizal kaso next week pa ata dadating ‘yung hingi ko kay Mr. Perez. ‘Yung binago naming sukat kahapon, baka

mabago ulit. Titignan ko pa bukas. Dadaan na rin ako sa site sa Makati.

Nagdagdag na ba kayo ng tao roon?” He stopped when he saw me inside the room.

“Eat na,” I mouthed.

He gave me a small smile before gesturing me a ‘wait’ sign. I pouted and

reached for his hand so I could pull him out of the room. Nagpabigat pa siya

para hindi ko siya mahatak patayo sa swivel chair niya. He was still talking

to someone on the phone.

“Dapat bukas, naroon na ‘yon. Hindi pwedeng ma-delay na naman tayo, ah..” He

stopped and moved the phone away to warn me. I pulled on his hand again.

“It’s 9 PM. You should eat and rest na,” sumimangot ako.

“Wait lang, Engineer. Kain lang ako. May nanggugulo rito, e,” he glared at me.

“Ha? Asawa? Joke lang ‘yun, ah. Sinong nagpakalat noon?”

“Hi, yes, I’m his wife!” I said so loud so the person he was talking to would

hear it .

“Wala ‘yon, Engineer! Multo ‘yon,” Sevi moved away from me. “Sige, tatawag

ulit ako mamaya. Salamat.”

I gave him a cute smile before pulling him out of the study room. Nakasimangot

pa siya noong umupo roon. Hinain ko sa kanya ang mga in-order ko habang

nakangiti, proud of myself for successfully making him eat dinner.

“Ang dami naman niyan! May handaan? Fiesta?” Reklamo niya.

“I’m celebrating, e,” I was still smiling.

“Bakit? Anong mayroon?” He tried to check his phone calendar.

“Naka-move on na kasi ako sa ‘yo,” I joked.

He stopped to look at me. He pursed his lips and raised a brow on me,

naghahamon. Ngumiti rin ako sa kanya at hindi binawi ang sinabi ko. I wanted

to see his reaction.

“Bawal,” he scowled.

“What? Anong bawal?!” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Bawal mag-move on. Walang magmomove-on sa pamilyang ‘to,” he joked after

biting on a slice of pizza. He was laughing, obviously not taking me

seriously.

“Whatever,” I tried to go inside the bedroom but stopped when my bag suddenly

fell on the floor. Sumabit pa sa upuan.

Sevi stood up to help me pick up my things. He suddenly stopped when he saw

the velvet box from Austin. My eyes widened and I tried to get it from him but

he moved his hands up para hindi ko maabot.

“Hey!” I tried to jump.

“Ano ‘to?” His brows furrowed when he tried to open it.

“I don’t know. It was a gift from Austin,” I explained. I was panicking for no

reason at all!

“Singsing?” He showed me the diamond ring inside. Nagsasalubong na ang kilay

niya sa sobrang inis. “Para saan ‘to?”

“He.. He said he wanted to replace my ring,” I showed him the knot ring he

gave me years ago. “Because it was already getting old. He said it doesn’t

mean anything-”

“Bullshit,” he hissed.

“W-what?” I blinked twice.

Nilagpasan niya ‘ko at padabog na nilagay sa bag ko ang box. I pouted and sat

in front of him while he was eating. Seryoso na ang mukha niya ngayon at

mukhang malalim ang iniisip. What? Galit ba siya sa ‘kin? Or kay Austin? Why?

“Why is your face like that?” I pointed at him. “Are you mad?”

“Hindi, ah,” he denied so fast. “Sinong galit dito? Hindi ako. Ikaw ata ‘yung

galit, e.”

“Then why are you frowning?” I tilted my head a little to the side.

“Hindi naman, ah! Sobrang saya ko!” He suddenly gave me a fake smile. “Gusto

mo ba nakangiti ako habang kumakain? Mukha naman akong gago n’on.”

“I tried to give the ring back to him, you know? But he didn’t take it back.

Sa akin na raw ‘yon so I guess ilalagay ko na lang siya sa collection ko ng

jewelries. I mean, diamond siya!” I didn’t know what I was saying. Kung ano-

ano na lang.

“Tara, sangla natin,” he chuckled.

Sevi and I became busy for the next three weeks. Sa gabi na lang namin

nakikita ‘yung isa’t isa so I just kept on missing him. Ang dami niyang

hinahandle ngayon but good thing he was holding out well. Today, I decided to

visit him again sa site nila sa Makati since naroon siya. Dalawang beses ko na

siyang pinupuntahan doon.

I was wearing a white fitted dress with a red jacket on my shoulders. My hair

was tied in a high ponytail and I was wearing shades. Naka-heels din ako kaya

nahirapan ako makarating sa site nila. May dala-dala pa ‘kong food for him.

“Hi, si Engineer Camero?” I asked a random person.

“Ah, nasa office po,” he pointed somewhere.

I thanked him before walking again. Humihinto pa ang ibang workers sa trabaho

kapag nakikita ako and then they would greet me. Hindi ko pinansin ang ibang

pag-catcall at dumiretso na lang sa loob ng office. I didn’t even knock. I

knew Sevi was alone inside. May sarili siyang office, e.

“Hi!” I greeted as soon as I opened the door.

“Pucha,” Sevi held on his chest out of surprise.

I giggled before closing the door and putting the paper bag on his desk. He

was doing something on his computer when I walked in. Tinigil niya rin kaagad

at mukhang hindi pa makapaniwala na nasa harapan niya ‘ko ngayon.

“What? You have never seen an angel in red jacket before?” I raised a brow.

“Kapal, ah,” he shook his head before getting the food out of the paper bag.

“Bakit nandito ka na naman? Wala ka bang trabaho, ha?”

“What? You don’t want me here?” I sat on his desk and crossed my legs. I also

took my jacket off because it was uncomfortable.

“Busog pa naman ako,” he whispered after taking a bite on my food. “Saan mo

‘to binili? Hindi masarap.”

“I cooked that,” I glared at him.

“Hindi masarap.. kasi sobrang sarap,” bawi niya at kumain ulit.

“Good,” I flipped my hair before getting down on his desk to walk around his

office. I looked at some folders and binuksan ko rin ang naka-roll na

blueprint na nasa table. He was watching me like a hawk.

“How do you guys understand this? It looks weird,” I asked while staring at

the.. figures.

“Tibay ng loob, tiyaga, at dasal lang,” payo niya.

“We’re going to do an inspection next next week in Batangas. You better be

there. Make sure may progress na there,” I glared at him.

“Yes, I’ll make sigurado na may progress na there,” he mocked me again.

“Stop it!” Inis na sabi ko. He just laughed at me.

Sabi niya busog siya at hindi raw masarap pero inubos naman niya ‘yung food.

What a scam!

After eating, he went out to go back to the site. He was wearing a white hard

hat and then kumuha rin siya para sa ‘kin noong sumunod ako sa kanya. I was

following him like a kid. I kept on looking around, amazed by everything. We

went to the third floor. It was a little scary since wala pang mga harang.

“Anong klaseng hagdanan ‘yan? Tapos na ba ‘yan?” Mainit na naman ulo ni Sevi.

“It looks good,” I whispered, checking the stairs on the side. “What’s wrong

with it?”

“Tapos, eto. Hindi n’yo ba nakikitang paling? Bumaba kayo rito tapos tignan

n’yo sa malayo nang makita n’yo,” Sevi pointed on the top. “Ang dami n’yo na

rito, ni isa sa inyo walang nakakapansin? Kailangan pa bang ako ang magsabi o

baka gusto n’yo si Architect Valeria ang mag-reklamo rito?”

“Paling ba?” Bulong ko ulit habang nakatingin sa tinuro niya. Hindi ko naman

napansin! Ano bang mata ang mayroon siya? Gosh.

“Hi ganda,” two workers smiled when they saw me.

“Tarantado, asawa ‘yan ni Engineer Camero,” binatukan sila nung isa.

“Akala ko wala pang asawa si Sir?” The worker asked.

“Ayan nga, si Ma’am. Bobo mo naman. Bahala ka. Lagot k-”

“Ano ‘yan?! Anong ginagawa n’yo diyan?!” Sevi shouted from afar.

“Tara na, tara na! Sorry Ma’am!” Nagmamadaling bumaba ‘yung tatlo. “Gago ka

kasi pare, e!”

I blinked twice before looking back at Sevi. He was already walking towards

me, looking so annoyed now. Wew, this man needs to take a chill pill! Mukhang

mas stressed pa siya sa ‘kin!

“Halika na nga,” he put his hand on my waist.

My heart doubled in beat. Hindi tuloy ako makapaglakad nang maayos hanggang sa

makabalik kami sa office niya. Alice called so I stopped walking. Pinapatawag

na ‘ko sa company para sa meeting so nagpaalam na ‘ko kaagad kay Sevi. Sa

susunod ko na lang siya guguluhin ulit.

The next week, I had a lunch with Austin and his dad. We were just discussing

business when he suddenly talked about my personal life.

“I heard your ex is an engineer from Valeria?” Austin’s dad asked me.

“Yes, Tito,” maikling sagot ko. I didn’t want to talk about it anymore.

“Is he bothering you? We can find another construction company for-”

“Of course not!” I denied so fast. Napatingin silang dalawa sa ‘kin. “I mean,

he’s not bothering me at all, Tito. We are both professionals. I don’t like

mixing my personal life with work.”

“I’m just thinking that maybe your ex is becoming a hindrance to your

relationship with my son,” he sipped on his water.

“What?” My brows furrowed. “First of all, Tito, I am not in a relationship

with anyone.”

“Oh, is that true, Austin? There were rumors about your engagement with Austin

going around the company. The board thinks it’s a good thing,” he advised.

“Engagement?” I scoffed and looked at Austin.

“I don’t know anything about this, Elyse,” he defended himself. “Mabilis

kumalat ang rumors sa company lalo na’t parehong mataas ang posisyon natin.

Besides, those are just rumors. It shouldn’t bother you too much.”

“That’s right, Elyse,” Tito Anthony nodded. “And it’s actually a good news.

It’s good publicity. Think of it as a business strategy.”

“How is that a business strategy?” I sighed and shook my head. “Austin and I

are just good friends, Tito.”

“I thought he’s already courting you?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“I am, Dad,” singit ni Austin. “I already told you that, Elyse.”

Gosh, that day was so stressful. Sino bang nagpakalat ng balitang ‘yon? Not

because Austin gave me a damn ring, it means we’re already engaged! Ni hindi

ko nga suot ang bigay niyang singsing. The knot ring I was wearing just made

it worse. They thought Austin gave it to me.

“Can you please tell Austin to stop sending flowers in my office?” I asked

Alice. “Everyone’s talking about it. It’s getting weird.”

“Oo nga po, Madam. Sige ho, sasabihin ko,” Alice nodded, taking the bouquet

with her.

The next day was another Sunday so I just stayed in the condo to rest. Sevi

did the same. I skipped gym day so tanghali na ‘ko nagising. Sevi went to the

gym around 5 AM but he took a nap after so halos sabay lang kaming nagising.

“Hey, what about lunch?” I asked, still sleepy.

“Eto na, nago-order na. Anong gusto mo?” He was scrolling on his phone beside

me on the bed. “Mexican food. Gusto ko ng taco.”

“Oh my gosh, me too,” umusog ako sa kama para makita ang screen ng phone niya.

Pumili ako ng order ko bago niya pinindot ‘yung check out. My brows furrowed

when I saw his homescreen.

“What’s that?” I tried to get his phone but he moved it away from me.

“Wala,” he tried to hide his phone from me.

“Patingin lang ako!” Kinuha ko ang phone niya at binigay niya naman sa ‘kin.

It was a picture of me in a board meeting. I was signing some documents while

seated in front. I looked so serious. Nasa gilid ko pa ang food containers ko.

He probably took it during break time.

“Crush ko ‘yan,” inagaw na niya ang phone sa ‘kin.

“If you want a photo of me, I can just airdrop it to you, you know? Stolen

picture pa. You can just ask me,” mayabang na sabi ko.

“Baka bold i-send mo sa ‘kin. Hindi ako interesado,” he shook his head

dramatically.

He went outside to watch a movie in the living room while waiting for the food

so I also went out with a juice on my hand, and a manicure set on my other

hand. I sat beside him and showed him the set.

“Can you do my nails for me?” I gave him a cute smile.

“Uy!” He looked so happy when he saw the nail polish. “Dali, lagyan kita!

Magaling ako rito, promise!”

I wanted to take it back. Kinabahan ako sa kanya!

He just kept the movie playing on the television while he was taking off my

current nail polish using a cotton ball. He was scratching my nails like he

was scratching a damn lottery card!

“Can you please ba careful?! Hindi ka mananalo ng 50 pesos dyan,” I glared at

him.

“Ah, kala ko may lalabas na number, e. Na-excite pa naman ako,” he scoffed.

Inayos niya na ang pagtanggal, and then he started putting on the base. He

looked so serious while doing it to my hand. Nilapit pa niya at hinipan-hipan

para matuyo. I bit my lower lip to stop myself from smiling.

“Pwede na ba maglagay nito?” He chose the color. It was beige. Simple lang

daw. “Tuyo na ba ‘yan?”

“Yeah, you can na,” I was just staring at him. My heart was beating so fast.

He held my hand again and placed it on his lap while he was opening the nail

polish bottle. Hinawakan niya na ulit ang kamay ko at dahan-dahang naglagay. I

was so careful with my nails before. Hindi ako nagpapalagay ng nail polish sa

hindi experienced but with Sevi, I could let him play with it.

“Hoy, shit, lumagpas,” he panicked.

“Just carefully wipe it with cotton buds,” I advised.

He stood up to get cotton buds. He did what I said but stopped when he heard

the doorbell. Umalis siya saglit para kuhanin ‘yung food.

“Diyan ka lang, ah. Huwag kang gagalaw. Kapag nasira ‘yang masterpiece ko,

lagot ka sa ‘kin,” he threatened.

“Whatever,” I chuckled.

Nilapag niya ang pagkain sa table bago tinapos ang paglalagay ng nail polish

sa ‘kin. He wouldn’t let me use my hands to eat so nagpumilit siyang susubuan

niya na lang ako nung burrito.

“I swear, tuyo na siya. Mabilis naman matuyo ‘to,” I showed him my nails.

“Ah,” he put the burrito in front of my mouth so I could take a bite. “Kainin

mo na ‘to. Ano bang hinihintay mo? Sabihin kong dadaan ang airplane?”

I rolled my eyes after taking a bite. My hands were placed on my lap just like

what he wanted. Hindi ko alam kung tama bang pinagawa ko sa kanya ang nails ko

or what.

“Ahmm, yummers,” he laughed, watching me chew the food.

The next week, like what I said, Austin decided to do a random inspection on

the site, just to see the progress. He brought his dad with him. The

Operations head was also with us, and a business partner.

“I told you, dapat sumabay ka na lang sa ‘kin. Sayang ang gas,” Austin said

when we arrived in Batangas.

“I can pay for it,” I gave him a fake smile.

We were welcomed immediately by Engineer Lavin. Nasa office si Sevi, may

inaasikaso pa raw. I pursed my lips and stayed quiet. Austin gave me a glance,

trying to watch my reaction.

“No, I want him here. Tell him to come here,” Tito Anthony said.

Hindi pa nakakaalis si Engineer Lavin para tawagin si Sevi, dumating na nga

siya. He was wearing a white dress shirt with three buttons opened. He folded

it until his elbows. Naka-black jeans din siya at safety shoes. He was holding

a blueprint and a hard hat on his other hand.

“Good afternoon, Sir,” Sevi greeted.

“We want to go around the site,” Tito Anthony said.

“Yeah, sure. Engineer Lavin, ‘yung hard hats,” he told him.

Sevi was talking to Austin’s dad while we were walking to the site. I was at

the back, getting bored. Austin was beside me, walking. Huminto kami saglit

nang abutan kami ni Engineer Lavin ng hard hats. Kumunot ang noo ko nang

kuhanin ni Austin ang para sa ‘kin at siya ang naglagay sa ulo ko.

“I can do it, you know,” I tried to move his hand away.

Sevi glanced at us for a moment before looking away. Sumimangot ako nang

masuot na ang hard hat at nag-ikot na kami sa site. Engineer Lavin was with

Sevi, helping him explain. Hindi ko na alam ang pinag-uusapan nila.

“Hey, careful,” Austin put his hand on my shoulders to pull me closer to him.

“Uh, thanks,” muntik na ‘ko mabunggo sa bakal.

“I guess you were right, Anthony,” our business partner laughed when he saw

what happened. “Mukhang nagkakamabutihan na nga si Miss Ledezma at si Austin,

huh?”

All of us suddenly stopped walking. I looked at Sevi with wide eyes. Bumaba

ang tingin niya sa kamay ni Austin sa balikat ko pero umiwas din kaagad. His

jaw moved aggressively before whispering something to Engineer Lavin.

I tried to deny it. “Oh, no, it’s not-”

“I’m still courting her, Sir,” Austin chuckled. “Hopefully, she would say yes.”

“Wala bang boyfriend si Miss Ledezma?” Mr. Del Rosario laughed. Our business partner who was also friends with Tito Anthony. They were close.

“No, she told me she was single,” Austin answered for me.

I saw how Sevi raised his brows when he heard that. Engineer Lavin said something to him but he just shook his head and gestured us to continue walking. He was suddenly in a bad mood. He was starting to avoid my eyes.

“Sorry, I’ll just take this call. Engineer Lavin, ikaw na,” paalam ni Sevi bago naglakad palabas ng site.

“Hey, I’ll just get water,” I informed Austin.

“Samahan na kita,” Austin held my arm.

“No,” I glared at him. “Let me go.”

“Okay,” he nodded, defeated.

Inagaw ko ang braso ko sa kanya bago naglakad paalis. Sevi was talking to someone on the phone and he was walking so fast back to his office. Mas mahaba

ang legs niya sa ‘kin so kailangan ko pa mag-exert ng effort para maabutan ko

siya.

“Engineer Camero!” I shouted so he would slow down.

He didn’t look at me. Pumasok siya sa office niya kaya binilisan ko ang lakad

ko para makasunod. I opened the door and went inside. I even locked it so no

one would enter. Baka sumunod nga si Austin.

Sevi was leaning on his desk with his arms crossed. Tinanggal na niya ang hard

hat niya kaya tinanggal ko na rin ang sa akin at nilapag sa gilid. He raised a

brow at me, waiting for me to say something.

“W-what?” I asked, not knowing what to say.

“Single?” He let out a sarcastic laugh.

“Well, I mean, we haven’t talked about it so anong sasabihin ko?” I defended

myself.

He scoffed before shaking his head and looking away from me. I walked and

stopped in front of him. Nakatingala pa ‘ko sa kanya dahil ang tangkad niya. I

wasn’t wearing heels today.

“Well, there were rumors going around the company about me.. and Austin. I

thought it wasn’t really a big de-”

My eyes widened when he suddenly pulled me and made me lean on his desk. I

swallowed hard when he held on my waist to make me sit there. Umupo nga ako

roon habang nasa harapan ko siya. His hands were on my sides, holding on to

the desk so tight I could see his veins. His eyes showed a little bit of anger

and annoyance.

“Paano kapag ako ‘yung hawakan ng ibang babae?” He touched my shoulder, kung

saan ako inakbayan ni Austin.

“Uh,” I looked away, unable to talk.

“Gusto mo ba siya?” Seryosong tanong niya sa ‘kin.

“Of course not!” I stared at his eyes. “We’re just friends. You know that.”

“Hindi ko alam,” he shook his head.

“Now you know,” I said proudly. “The man I like is you. How about that? Are

you aware of that one?”

His hand went up from my shoulder to the side of my neck. He leaned on me and

stopped inches away from my face. I looked down on his lips before my gaze

went back to his eyes, trying to communicate.

My lips parted when he suddenly kissed me. I automatically closed my eyes when

he sucked on my lower lip before pushing his tongue inside my mouth. His other

hand went on my waist. He angled my face before kissing me deeper.

I was already panting when he stopped. My lips were still parted, wanting more

of him.

“Hindi ka na single ngayon,” he told me. “Naiintindihan mo?”

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R-18.

“Oh, we’re.. We’re in a relationship now?”

I bit my lower lip while he was still in front of me, staring at my eyes. I

was wearing a dress so it was a bit awkward for me to sit on the desk while he

was in between my legs. Both of his hands were still holding on to my sides.

His lips looked so kissable, gosh. I wanted another kiss.

“Ayaw mo ba?” He raised a brow. He was so close to me.

“Of course I want to!” I put my arms around his neck so I could pull him

closer to me. “Since day 1. I missed you so much.”

He glanced at the door before holding my neck and kissing me again. I closed

my eyes as I wrapped my arms tighter around his neck to deepen the kiss. I

opened my mouth so he could push his tongue inside me. He tasted every corner

of me.

He pulled my waist closer as he tried to move forward, spreading my legs

wider. I whispered a moan when his hand went down from my neck to my chest. He

aggressively held and massaged my mound against my dress while kissing me.

My hands went down to his chest, unbuttoning his dress shirt. His kisses went

through my jaw until he playfully licked on my neck. He started sucking and

biting a bit before kissing. I pushed his polo over his shoulders, revealing

his perfect body. I bit my lower lip and arched my neck while he was kissing

me there. I was admiring the sculpted muscles in front of me.

“You think it’s okay to do this here?” I was nervous. I mean, I locked the

door but we were at work!

“Wala akong pakialam,” he whispered before kissing me again.

He carefully unzipped my dress and pulled the sleeves down, revealing my

strapless bra. He pushed my bra down before holding my mounds with his hands.

He started kissing my neck again, down to my chest. I whispered a moan when he

started sucking on my chest. I grabbed a handful of his hair while my eyes

were closed. Tinungkod ko ang kamay ko sa lamesa so it would support my

weight.

He played with my nipples with his fingers and tongue, which made me crazy. He

showered kisses on my chest until he reached my jaw again. He ran his nose on

it before pushing the hem of my dress up, revealing my laced panties. I was

still wearing sandals! Natanggal na ‘yung isa at nahulog sa sahig.

“Baba,” he pointed on the floor.

“O-oh, okay,” I went down the table and leaned against it.

I was panting when he swiftly pulled on my panties, taking it off me until it

reached my knees. He held my waist and made me sit on the desk again so he

could completely take my panties off from my feet.

He went closer to me and put his hand on my left side to support his weight.

He stared at my eyes while his other hand caressed my thigh, slowly going up.

I was about to close my legs together when he suddenly dug a finger inside me.

“Ah, oh my,” I whispered on his neck.

He hooked my right leg on his arm before putting his hand again on my side to

support his weight. I closed my eyes when he started moving his fingers inside

me. Napahawak kaagad ako sa lamesa habang ginagalaw niya ang kamay niya. He

was staring at me, watching my reaction. I moaned when he massaged on my clit

using his thumb.

“Masarap?” He asked, pursing his lips.

“Fuck you,” I whispered, holding on to his arm.

His eyes turned a shade darker, like I said something that turned him on. I moaned again when he started thrusting his fingers inside me so fast and so deep I felt like I was already on my edge. He kissed my lips again and pushed his tongue inside. His tongue mimicked his finger inside me.

“Ah, I’m-”

I stopped talking when he pulled his finger out. I was about to complain when he suddenly spread my legs with his two hands before putting his face in between. I grabbed his hair and arched my back when I felt his tongue inside me. I put my legs over his shoulders.

He started thrusting a finger inside me while licking my sensitive bud. My eyes were closed. I was holding on to his hair like I was holding onto the only sanity left inside me. I sighed heavily when I felt my release. I wanted to move away from him out of embarrassment but he wouldn’t let me go. He cleaned me with his tongue.

“What the hell, Sev,” I was panting.

He was now standing in front of me, wiping his lower lip with his thumb. I stared at him with wide eyes. I can’t believe I was feeling wet again. I felt weak, but I wanted more. I wanted more of him.

“Hinahanap na ata tayo roon,” he pointed at the door.

“Not yet,” I licked my lower lip a little.

He raised his brows when I reached for his belt. He moved closer to me and stood in between my legs again while I was unbuckling his belt. He just let me do that. He wasn’t even hesitating while I was there, feeling so nervous.

He put his two hands on my sides to support his weight. I pulled on his pants after unbuckling his belt. The side of his lips rose up when his black boxers were revealed. I could see his hard-on clearly. I stopped to stare at it.

He was already wearing nothing on top. I reached out and touched his shaft against his boxers, which made him close his eyes. He parted his lips when I started rubbing on it. I knew very well how to pleasure him. We were together for years.

I pulled his boxers down and his member sprung free in front of me. My eyes widened as I stared at it, feeling even more wet down there. I bit my lower

lip and touched it with my right hand. Three strokes and he already pulled me

down the desk and made me turn around.

He pushed on my back which made me bend over his desk. He touched and massaged

my clit before pushing his member inside me.

“Oh my god,” I moaned, feeling pain and pleasure at the same time.

“Shh, baka may makarinig,” he whispered on my neck.

He put his hand on my mouth to stifle my moans while he was thrusting slowly

but deeply inside me. Every thrust, I would let out a moan. I held on the desk

so tight when he pushed my feet apart before thrusting so fast inside me, I

started to get scared for the desk. I thought it would break.

He put my hair on the other side of my neck so he could kiss me there.

Something was already building up on my stomach when he made me turn around

again. He carried me up to the desk before pushing himself inside me again. I

put my arms around his neck while he was thrusting inside.

“Ah, tangina,” he whispered on my neck.

“Sev,” I moaned, touching his back.

The desk started to make sounds because of his thrusts. He massaged my

sensitive bud with his other hand while kissing my neck. I sighed heavily when

I felt my release.

He did a few more thrusts before I felt his hot release inside me. He gave me

slow thrusts, closing his eyes and looking up, panting heavily. I could see

the veins on his neck and hands.

“I’m.. taking p-pills, don’t worry,” I whispered.

He nodded before pulling himself out and reaching for the box of tissue placed

on his desk. He wiped me before wiping himself. I went down the desk and put

my panties on while he was busy putting his jeans back and buckling his belt

again.

“Can you zip me up?” I asked him, showing him my back.

He zipped me up and planted a kiss on my shoulder before getting his dress

shirt from the floor. I laughed when I saw a little stain on the sleeves. He

buttoned it in front of me before folding the sleeves until his elbows, hiding

the stain. Medyo nalukot pa.

“Engineer Camero!” We heard Engineer Lavin outside.

Nagmadali kong inayos ang dress ko, pati ang hair ko. Medyo pawis pa ‘yung noo

ko so I got my handkerchief out of my bag to wipe my sweat. Sevi pushed his

hair back using his hand before opening the door. I was standing there

awkwardly, looking away.

“Uhm, Engineer Camero, may itatanong daw si Sir Anthony sa site. Babalik ka pa

ba?” Engineer Lavin glanced at me, smirking.

“Oo, babalik na,” Sevi nodded.

Kinuha ko ang bag ko at sumunod na sa kanila palabas. I tied my hair up while

walking para hindi halatang magulo. Engineer Lavin and Sevi were talking while

we were on our way back. Sinuot ko na rin ang hard hat ko nang makarating kami

sa site. Austin was there, talking to his dad but he stopped when he saw me.

“Hey, are you okay?” Austin looked so worried.

“What? Of course. Why are you asking?” I already checked my face on the

mirror. Medyo humulas ‘yung makeup pero lipstick lang ang kailangan kong

i-retouch.

“Nothing. You look weird,” Austin put his hand on my shoulder.

“Please stop doing that,” lumayo ako sa kanya.

We were walking again. Sevi was talking to Austin’s dad, explaining something

about the construction and the materials. I looked away, trying to stretch my

legs. They were shaking a bit. Damn.

“Mukhang hardworking ka, Engineer. Nalulukot pa ang damit mo. Siguro hands-on

ka talaga rito,” Mr. Del Rosario commented.

I bit my lower lip and looked away, feeling awkward. Tinignan ni Sevi ang polo

niya at sinubukang takpan ‘yon. Engineer Lavin was trying to contain his laugh

by covering his mouth.

“Very hands-on, Sir,” Sevi answered.

“Sa sobrang hands-on po niya, napakarami niyang tinatrabaho rito,” Engineer

Lavin chuckled. “Lalo na sa office!”

“Are you cold?” Austin asked, about to take his coat off to lend it to me.

“No,” I denied so fast.

“You’re shaking a bit,” he looked so confused. “Oh, nevermind. You’re sweating

buckets.”

“Saan ka galing, Engineer? Mukhang natagalan,” Austin’s dad asked. “May

problema ba sa site? What’s with the phone call?”

“Ah, hindi po. Tumawag lang ‘yung Architect namin sa site sa Rizal. Nagpunta

na rin ako sa office para maghanap ng.. files,” Sevi bit his lower lip.

“Miss Ledezma,” our Operations head went to me, holding her iPad. “May

ipapacheck lang po ako sa.. Okay lang po ba kayo? Namumula po ‘yung sa banda

rito n’yo,” she pointed on her collarbones.

“W-what?” I took my phone out to see.

Fuck! Sevi gave me a damn mark!

“Ah, haha!” I laughed awkwardly. “Lamok! Nakagat ako, e! Ang dami palang

mosquito rito!”

“What’s the problem, Elyse? Mosquito? Engineer Camero, hindi ba dapat safe ang

site sa mga ganyan. Mamaya may dalang sakit na pala ‘yung mga lamok dito,”

Austin’s dad scolded him.

“Wala naman po,” Sevi looked around. “Baka may.. ibang kumagat kay Miss

Ledezma.”

Engineer Lavin let out a short laugh before covering his mouth again and

looking away because of Sevi’s glare. Oh my god, I felt so embarrassed. Mabuti

na lang naglakad na kami paalis doon.

“Elyse, do you want to have dinner together?” Austin asked while we were walking back to the parking.

“How about ‘yung mga office n’yo? Are they comfortable? Are they clean?” Mr. Del Rosario asked. “Do you mind if we take a look?”

I started coughing. Parang may bumara sa lalamunan ko. Napatingin sila sa ‘kin, including Sevi. Austin worriedly gave me a bottle of water. Kinuha ko ‘yon sa kamay niya at ininuman. Good thing it was new.

“Malinis naman po ang mga office. Napakalinis,” Engineer Lavin nodded. “Pati mga ginagawa namin sa office, napakalinis. Diba, Engineer Camero?”

“Tama ho,” Sevi nodded. He wasn’t even nervous.

“Mind if we take a look?” Austin’s dad asked.

“Sure, Sir,” sagot naman ni Sevi.

I felt like I would faint. My heart was beating so fast while we were walking towards the office. Inuna namin ang ibang office ng ibang engineers and architects bago pumasok sa office nila Sevi. Good thing the aircon was left turned on so malamig na sa loob.

“Smells different, right, Elyse?” Austin whispered to me. He sounded so

innocent.

“I think not,” I shrugged.

“Malinis naman,” Mr. Del Rosario nodded. “Kaninong desk ‘yon? Medyo messy,

Engineer.”

“Ah sa ‘kin po,” Sevi went to his desk to fix it. “Nagmamadali ho kasi ako

kanina noong naghahanap ng files. Medyo nakaka-pressure si Architect. Hindi ko

na naayos.”

“Are you sick, Engineer Camero?” Austin’s dad asked, looking at the trash bin

full of tissue.

Why the fuck do they keep on noticing everything?! Iisipin ko nang naghahanap

talaga sila ng mali, my gosh! Pinaypayan ko ang sarili ko gamit ang kamay ko.

I was starting so sweat again out of nervousness.

“Ah, hindi po. Nag-linis lang ako ng lamesa kanina,” Sevi answered casually.

Mabuti na lang lumabas na rin kami roon. I put my hands on my back and played

with my fingers while waiting for them to finish their discussion. Austin’s

dad was asking so many questions. Good thing Sevi was patient and smart enough

to answer all of them. He was so casual, like he wasn’t talking to the

Chairman of the board.

“Are you hungry? Dinner?” Austin asked again.

“No, I need to go home early,” I looked at him.

“Austin, we’re going. Thanks a lot, Engineer Camero,” Tito Anthony said before

walking back to the parking lot with Mr. Del Rosario and the Operations head.

I was left here with Austin. Sevi, and Engineer Lavin were standing two meters

away from us. They were talking about something but Sevi’s gaze was on my

direction. Tawa nang tawa si Engineer Lavin habang may sinasabi.

“Maybe I can visit you sa condo mo? You agreed last time. Sabi mo next time,

right?” Austin asked again.

“No, I don’t allow visitors, e,” I gave him an awkward smile.

I was about to walk away when he held on my arm. Napairap ako bago naglakad

pabalik para harapin siya.

“Engineer Camero!” I looked at Bianca who was walking towards our direction.

Umiwas siya ng tingin sa ‘kin at naglakad palapit kay Sevi. “Have you eaten

lunch? Kinain mo ba ‘yung dinala ko?”

What? Nag-dala na naman siya ng food?! Nakaka-ilan na siya, ha! She’s an

engineer, not a chef! How annoying!

“Hindi. Busog ako, e, kaya binigay ko kay Engineer Lavin,” siniko ni Sevi si

Engineer Lavin.

“Oo. Sarap nga, e! Lasang ginataang munggo,” Engineer Lavin smirked. “Mainit-

init pa! Malapot! Masarap! Diba, Engineer Camero?”

“Malay ko, gago,” Sevi rolled his eyes.

“Elyse,” Austin called me again to get my attention. “Let’s go? Nauna na sila

Daddy. I think we need to go now.”

“Yeah, right,” I nodded. “Magpaalam muna tayo sa kanila.”

Austin looked like he didn’t want to pero sumunod pa rin siya sa ‘kin nang

maglakad ako palapit sa pwesto nila Sevi. Sevi crossed his arms over his chest

and raised a brow when he saw us walking towards their direction. Bianca was

saying something to him but he wasn’t listening.

“Engineer Lavin, Engineer Camero, thank you for accommodating us today. I’m

sure you guys are busy,” I gave them a smile.

“We’re going now,” Austin held my arm and tried to pull me away.

My eyes widened when Sevi pulled me on my waist, forcing Austin to let go.

Bianca’s lips parted, stepping back. Engineer Lavin chuckled, whispering

something to himself.

“Ingat kayo,” Sevi leaned to give me a soft kiss.

I blinked twice when he let go of me. My heart was beating so fast! Bianca and

Austin both looked so shocked about what happened. I fake coughed and stepped

back, holding on my bag so tight. I couldn’t look at him anymore!

“T-thanks. We’re.. g-going now,” I awkwardly glanced at Engineer Lavin who was

already smirking. He just gave me a small wave, raising his brows to tease me.

Nang makarating kami sa parking, binuksan ko na kaagad ang pinto ng kotse ko.

I was about to go inside when Austin suddenly talked.

“What the fuck was that, Elyse?” He asked me, gritting his teeth.

“That was.. a kiss?” I almost rolled my eyes.

“You know what I mean. What the fuck was that? You didn’t tell me about that!”

Austin sounded mad.

“I’m not single anymore, okay? What’s there to be so mad about?” My brows

furrowed, closing the door of my car again to walk towards him.

“Sabi mo sa ‘kin you’re not in a relationship with anyone and then suddenly..

you’re not single anymore?” He looked like he was hurt.

“Hey, listen,” I sighed heavily. “I’m so sorry but not because I wasn’t in a

relationship with anyone before means it was an invitation for you to court

me. I am not interested in you. I already made that clear.”

“I was just asking you to give me a chance,” he swallowed hard. “He hurt you,

Elyse. He doesn’t deserve you.”

“Your opinion is not valid. Ano bang alam mo sa kung ano ang deserve ko?!” I

was starting to get annoyed. “That is on me! Stay out of it!”

“You will regret this in the future, Elyse,” he shook his head as his tears

started to fall. “He would be the downfall of you. Again.”

I glared at him before getting inside my car again. He drove away so fast.

Huminga ako nang malalim bago nag-drive paalis. I went back to my office to

get some of my things before going home. Sevi stayed in Batangas for a week so

I was alone in the unit. It was fine, though. Nagvivideocall naman kami.

“Miss Ledezma, you have a visitor po,” sabi ni Alice sa intercom.

“Who?” My brows furrowed. “I don’t have any appointment today. I’m busy. You

know I’m not accepting visitors to-”

“Si Engineer Camero p-”

“Let him in, please,” I cut her off.

Dali-dali kong kinuha ang maliit kong mirror para tignan ‘yung itsura ko. I

winked on the mirror before playing it down. I acted like I was busy with the

documents when Sevi came inside my office.

“Hi,” Sevi gave me a smile after closing the door.

“You’re back, baby!” I sounded like an excited kid. Tumayo kaagad ako at

tumakbo sa kanya para yakapin siya sa leeg. Good thing. I was wearing heels.

“Madam, coffee- Shocks!” Alice suddenly closed the door.

Binitawan ko kaagad si Sevi sa sobrang hiya. I sat on the couch awkwardly.

Lumabas si Sevi saglit para kausapin si Alice bago pumasok ulit at umupo sa

tabi ko.

“Sabi niya hindi ka pa naglu-lunch,” Sevi put the paper bag on the coffee

table.

“What’s that?” My brows furrowed.

“Carbonara. Nag-luto ako,” he smiled proudly. “Bagong luto ‘yan. Aalis na rin

ako. Pupunta pa ‘kong Tagaytay.”

“Agad?!” I pouted, reaching for his hand. “I haven’t seen you for a week!”

“Sa ‘yo ako uuwi mamaya,” he kissed my forehead before getting his things.

“Ugh,” I rolled my eyes, opening the food container.

“Kumain ka, ah,” he reminded me before leaving my office.

I hoped that the rumors with Austin would die down. It did, but since Sevi

visited my office that day, napalitan naman ‘yun ng rumors about me and Sevi!

Sabi ng iba, nililigawan daw niya ‘ko and sabi naman ng iba, kabit ko si Sevi

kay Austin. My gosh! This company’s stressing me out!

I didn’t want a public relationship from the start. Hindi kami ganoon ni Sevi

kahit noon pa. We didn’t like broadcasting it, lalo na’t may project kami

together. Baka sabihin ng iba binigyan ko ng project si Sevi dahil favorite

ko. I wasn’t even informed na may project sa Valeria when I came here!

I ate his carbonara and went back to work. I went home around 6 PM. I just had

to check some files. Muntik na ‘ko mapagsarhan ng elevator sa parking ng

condo. Mabuti na lang napindot ko ‘yung button.

“Sorry, I-” I stopped when I saw Sevi inside, kakarating lang din. “Hey, you look sad. What happened?”

“Nag-tae ka ba sa carbonara ko?” His brows furrowed, thinking about something.

“What? No,” I shook my head. “Why?”

“Hindi ba masarap?” He looked like he was hurt.

“Masarap naman, ah! Sinong may sabing hindi? I will pull their hair!” I crossed my arms over my chest and raised a brow.

“Wala. Papansin lang siguro si Luna,” he still looked so confused. Halatang may iniisip siya hanggang sa makarating kami sa unit.

“What? Nilutuan mo rin si Luna, huh?” Reklamo ko nang ibalik ang heels ko sa walk-in closet. “I thought ako lang ang nilutuan mo. I even thought it was sweet! Dalawa pala kami! Cheater?!”

“Pinakain ko rin ng carbonara ‘yung construction workers tsaka si Engineer Lavin. Ang dami ko naman palang kabit kung ganoon,” he raised a brow.

“Ewan ko sa ‘yo,” nagtatampong sabi ko. “Buti nga sa ‘yo. May natae sa carbonara mo! Hmp.”

“Ikaw, below the belt ka na, ah,” Sevi held his chest dramatically. “Nahu-hurt ako!”

“Whatever,” I rolled my eyes before leaving the room. “Hindi masarap carbonara

mo!” Binunggo ko pa siya dahil nakaharang siya sa dadaanan ko.

“Aba, nakaka-offend ka na, ah!” Reklamo niya sa ‘kin bago ako lumabas.

I showered and went out of the bathroom wearing my purple nighties. When I

went out, Sevi was already trying to find something to cook. Nakasimangot pa.

Inismiran niya ‘ko nang mag-tama ang tingin namin.

“What? You’re mad?” I chuckled.

“Bawiin mo ‘yung sinabi mo,” he sounded like a kid.

“About your carbonara?” I laughed. Sineryoso niya pala ‘yon. “Oh, I’m sorry

na, babe. Masarap ‘yung luto mo, promise.”

“Buti alam mo. ‘Yung luto mo nga hindi edible, e,” ganti niya.

“Hey, I already said sorry, ah! Why are you still attacking?!” Reklamo ko.

“Joke lang,” he laughed and gave me a hug.

The next day, I woke up around 5 AM because of Sevi’s stupid alarm. Palaging

ako ‘yung nagigising habang siya ‘yung tulog pa. I pulled on my hair in

frustration before reaching for his phone to turn the alarm off. Umupo ako sa

kama, bringing the blanket with me to cover my chest because I wasn’t wearing

anything on top. Panty lang. We had a rough night.

“Hey, wake up,” I hit his bare back with a pillow so he would get up. “Wake

up, stupid.”

“Ano..” He looked irritated. He faced the other side and tried to sleep again.

Inis akong bumaba ng kama at sinuot ang shirt niya sa sahig bago ko siya

hinampas nang malakas gamit ‘yung unan. He immediately glared at me, getting

up using his arms.

“Go shower. I’ll prepare breakfast,” binato ko sa kanya ang unan bago ako

naglakad palabas.

“Hoy, sabay tayo shower!” He shouted from the room.

I raised my middle finger in the air before going to the kitchen. I heard his

laugh from the bedroom.

I just prepared fried eggs and bacon. Nag-toast na rin ako ng bread bago

nilapag sa lamesa. Sevi came out of the walk-in closet, looking so fresh. Basa

pa ang buhok. He was wearing a pair of maong jeans and white shirt. He buckled

his belt before sitting down in front of me.

“Inom daw next Saturday kasama sila Sam. Sama kita,” he suddenly said.

“Really?!” I sounded so happy. “Sure! Wait.. Kasama si Yanna?”

“Oo naman. Bakit?” He raised a brow.

“Si Hiro?” I asked again.

“Alam mo, ikaw,” padabog niyang binitawan ang utensils niya at masama akong

tinignan. “Itatali na talaga kita, e.”

“Ooh, what? In bed?” I looked so thrilled.

“Sa ‘kin, tangek,” he rolled his eyes, laughing. “Kung ano-ano iniisip mo

diyan.”

I looked disappointed. Inirapan ko na lang siya at tinapos ang pag-kain bago

naligo at pumasok sa work. The next day, Sevi told me great news about Luna

while we were watching a movie.

“Where are you going?” I asked when he suddenly walked away.

Pagbalik niya, dala-dala na niya ang laptop. He sat on the floor and placed it

on the coffee table. He was browsing on some files. Umupo rin ako sa sahig

para tabihan siya.

“What’s that?” I asked when I saw an illustration of beautiful house. “Project

mo?”

“Project ni Theo,” he pointed at it.

“Why are you showing it to me?” My brows furrowed.

“Bahay natin,” he looked at it again.

My heart doubled in beat. I stared at him for too long before turning my gaze

back to the house. The design was so beautiful. Parang gawa ng professional.

It wasn’t as big as a mansion but it was enough for a family. Modern din ang

design so hindi siya ganoon kalaki.

“Ayoko ng masyadong malaki. Mukhang malungkot para sa pamilya, diba?” He

glanced at me.

“You’re right,” I whispered, remembering our house. “It’s better if family

members would easily see each other every day. It would make them closer. Just

enough space for privacy na rin.”

“May gusto ka bang ipabago?” He asked again.

“No, it looks good. Who designed it?” I still couldn’t get over the fact that

he referred to it as ‘our’ house.

“Architect Valeria,” he chuckled.

I nodded, smiling. “She’s so good. Saan mo balak ipatayo?”

“May pinamanang lupa si Papa. Dito lang din, malapit sa kumpanya. Madali para

sa ‘tin,” he held my hand. “Nakausap ko na.. si Papa.”

“R-really?” I stuttered.

“Nagkabalikan sila ni Mama,” he chuckled. “Okay lang. Basta masaya si Mama,

okay na ‘ko roon. Lumipat na rin sila ng bahay.”

“Engineer Camero, huh,” I referred to his dad. “He’s still an engineer,

right?”

“Oo naman. Mas magaling pa sa ‘kin,” he smiled and leaned on the couch,

staring at the laptop screen. “Sabi ko naman sa ‘yo, mabilis akong

magpatawad.”

I pursed my lips and leaned my head on his shoulder, thinking about my family.

Pakiramdam ko wala nang mababago pa sa family namin. I should let it go and be

free. Wala na si Mommy. She was the only one trying to fix it.

“It sucks being a Ledezma,” I chuckled while he was playing with my hand.

I went closer to him to cling on his arm. He suddenly stopped playing with my

hand. Napatingin ako sa kamay niya nang may kuhanin siya sa may ilalim ng

lamesa.

My eyes widened when I saw a small box on his hand. He opened it, revealing a

beautiful ring inside. Tears started to pool on my eyes.

“Gusto mo palitan ng apelyido ko?” He asked, smiling.

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“I am freaking engaged, Ida!”

I sounded so thrilled about getting engaged. I moved my hands up to stare at

the beautiful ring again. Ida gave me a wide smile. Napatigil ako nang lumapit

siya para yakapin ako. I made squealing noises when she tightened the hug.

“Congratulations!” She let me go and held my hand to look at the ring. “You

were right! It was an engagement ring. Worth it naman palang mag-assume.”

“You know, with Sevi, everything’s sure,” I smirked before sitting down again

on my swivel chair. “We can’t announce the engagement yet, though. Hindi pa

alam ng family niya. Ikaw pa lang nakakaalam, actually.”

“Wow, what an honor!” She dramatically held her chest and wiped her fake

tears. “Dahil diyan, ipagkakalat ko na.”

“Ida!” I glared at her.

She laughed to tease me. Both of us looked at the door when Alice knocked

before going inside my office. She was holding an iPad. She gave Ida a small

bow as a sign of greeting before looking at me, pointing at her clock.

“Meeting, Madam,” she reminded me.

“Oh, right,” I stood up and retouched my make-up quick. Tumayo na rin si Ida

at kinuha ang gamit niya para umalis na. She gave me a kiss on the cheek

before leaving.

I was wearing a black turtle-neck sweater partnered with white slacks and

black heels. I was holding my white coat on my arm while walking. Pagkapasok

ko ng board room, tumayo silang lahat at naglakad ako papunta sa harapan,

gesturing them to sit down. Sevi was there, again, but with Engineer Ramos

this time. Austin was also there, sitting adjacent to my side.

“You may start,” I told the employee from Valeria.

I got my pen out and started taking down some random notes on my notebook. I

was listening but I just couldn’t stop myself from looking at Sevi. He was

wearing a white button-down polo with short sleeves and black jeans. He was

playing with his pen, lightly tapping it against the table. He tilted his head

a little to the right when the presenter mentioned his name.

“Yes, I’m currently handling 4 projects. I assign Engineer Ramos right here to

look after the construction when I’m out,” Engineer Camero answered.

Hindi ko nga alam kung ano ang tanong! I was busy looking at him. He pushed

his hair back using his hand while looking in front. When he noticed me

staring, he looked at me and gave me a short playful wink. My eyes widened. I

immediately looked away from him, coughing.

“Are you okay, Madam?” Alice asked.

“Yes, of course,” I cleared my throat before focusing my attention back to the

presentation. Gosh, Sevi just made me blush with one gesture.

Austin was quiet. I knew he was looking at me and glancing back at Sevi like

he was watching our actions. Alice put a cup of coffee in front of me so I

took a sip. Austin stared at my hand and sighed heavily.

I was a little confused when Sevi stood up and went to the front to discuss

something. Sinundan ko siya ng tingin. He was talking about the construction,

and the materials they ordered. I didn’t understand anything. I was so busy

staring at him while he was talking.

“As you can see right here, Architect Rosario and I had to make changes in order to make a stronger foundation,” Sevi pointed on the projector screen using the red laser coming out of the pen.

“Are you allowed to make changes without informing us?” Austin suddenly asked.

“We are informing you right now,” Engineer Camero answered casually.

“Hindi ba dapat sinesend pa ‘yan for approval?” Austin asked again. I had no idea where Austin was coming from.

“Yes, Sir,” Engineer Camero nodded.

“How would you know if those changes are really important to the construction?” Austin asked again, obviously getting annoyed now.

“Because I’m an engineer,” Sevi answered.

I bit my lower lip and took a sip on my coffee to hide my grin. I heard some short laughs from other people, and some whispers. Napatakip din si Alice sa bibig niya para pigilan ang tawa. This meeting was becoming a damn circus.

“This is why we are explaining the reason behind it, the advantages in terms of safety and little disadvantages on the budget. I already sent this to Miss Ledezma’s office beforehand,” Sevi looked at me.

“That’s right, Mr. Guerrero,” I nodded. “I’ll ask my secretary to send it to your e-mail if you would like to know more about it.”

“Now, if you would let me continue, Sir, I would like to explain to you, in Layman’s term, some technical stuff about the construction which you might not understand if I go into detail,” Sevi looked so pissed now.

May ibang natawa nanaman ngunit tinakpan ang bibig para pigilan ang sarili. I bit my lower lip and gestured Engineer Camero to continue. Austin gave him a short nod before Sevi continued discussing. I scratched my head a little. Why the hell are they fighting in the middle of a meeting?

“What is your deal, seriously? Kulang ka ba sa tulog?” I whispered to Austin.

“Kind of,” maikling sagot niya, hindi man lang ako tinignan.

“Maybe you need to take a break from-”

“Miss Ledezma,” Sevi suddenly called me. Napaayos kaagad ako ng upo at tumingin sa kanya.

Tinaasan niya ‘ko ng kilay bago nagpatuloy sa pagsasalita. I pursed my lips and directed my attention back to him. What the hell, I can’t believe I just got scolded by him for not listening. I am the damn C.E.O! And I just let him

do that, huh?!

The meeting went on for another hour before I adjourned it. Everyone stood up.

Some left the room and some went to Sevi so they could talk about something.

Kinuha ko ang gamit ko at maglalakad na sana palabas but Austin blocked my

way.

“Congratulations po sa engagement niyo, Sir Austin and Miss Ledezma!” An

employee smiled at us, looking at my hand.

“W-what?” My lips parted. Everyone was already looking at us.

“Ang ganda ho ng singsing niyo, Miss Ledezma. Congratulations,” another

employee said.

Austin chuckled. “Thanks.”

I glared at him but he already left the room. What the hell is wrong with him?

Is he mad at me? Nakakainis naman! Now everyone’s talking about my damn

engagement with him! I really need to announce it as soon as possible.

“Congratulations, Miss Ledezma,” sarkastikong sabi ni Sevi nang hawakan ang

door handle.

“Engineer Camero, to my office, please,” I glared at him before walking away.

Alice was behind me, trying to catch up dahil sa bilis ng lakad ko. I could hear the sound of my heels on the floor. Alice immediately went back to her seat and waited for Sevi to enter my office.

Inis akong umupo sa couch ko, crossing my legs. In just a few minutes, the door opened and Sevi went inside. He raised a brow when he saw me scowling.

“That was so unprofessional,” I scolded him.

He rolled his eyes and sat next to me, leaning on the couch. Hinintay niya ‘kong magsalita ulit. Alam niyang marami pa ‘kong gustong sabihin.

“First of all, you should have answered him with respect. His position in this company is no joke,” pinagalitan ko ulit siya.

“Para naman kasi siyang gago. Pati ‘yon kailangan pa itanong? Hindi ba siya nag-iisip?” He sounded annoyed. “Common sense? Wala siya n’on?”

“I know but maybe it was a genuine question, you know,” I massaged my head.

“Genuine question? Kaunti na lang parang gusto niya na ‘kong suntukin, e,” he rolled his eyes. “Pucha, basag siya sa ‘kin. Pagtulungan namin ‘yan ni Theo.

Abangan namin sa labas.”

“What the hell, Sevi,” hinampas ko siya.

“Joke lang, eto naman!” He laughed when he saw my reaction. “E’di

pinagtulungan din ako ng mga may galit sa ‘kin. Ang dami pa naman nila. Dapat

gumawa na sila ng group chat tapos add nila ‘yung Austin. Alam mo pangalan ng

group?”

“What?” I almost rolled my eyes.

“Samahan ng Pinagselosan ako,” he chuckled.

“Stop kidding around! I’ll remind you one last time. Don’t let personal

feelings affect your work!” I glared at him.

“E ikaw naman, nakikipag-chikahan ka pa habang nagsasalita ako,” pinagalitan

niya naman ako ngayon! “Tama ba ‘yon, Miss Ledezma? Ano bang chika? Pa-sagap

naman ako niyan.”

“I know, I’m sorry, okay?” I pouted. “I was just asking him if kulang siya sa

tulog or maybe he has a hangover. Hindi naman siya ganoon usually.”

“At congratulations? Sa engagement niyo?” He let out a sarcastic laugh before

holding my hand to show me the ring. “Sa ganda ng singsing na bigay ko

sasabihin nilang galing sa kaniya? The taste, oy! Tsk.”

“I know you’re pissed but I will make it clear, okay? Ang bilis lang kumalat ng rumors sa company na ‘to but it will die down,” I assured him.

“Sure, baby,” he casually said, putting his arms on the back of his head.

I looked at the door before moving closer to him to give him a soft kiss. He parted his lips and looked down on me to welcome my kisses. He did not respond, though.

“Kailangan ko na bumalik sa site,” he said.

“Later na,” I pouted, putting my legs on the sides of his hips.

He put his hands on my waist to support my weight. I moved closer to him and gave him a hug, leaning my head on his chest. I could hear his heartbeat. He caressed my hair softly and planted a soft kiss on my head. It was the most comfortable place in the world.

“Alis na ‘ko,” Sevi pushed me a little.

I sighed heavily, looking lonely. He laughed and held my face to give me a kiss. I opened my mouth and let his tongue enter me. His other hand went up to my chest to massage my mounds while he was kissing me.

“Hindi pa naman nila ‘ko tinatawag,” Sevi suddenly changed his mind.

I giggled before standing up to open the door. “Alice, don’t let anyone in,

please. Thank you.”

Sinara ko na ang pinto at ni-lock. I checked if the blinds were closed. Pati ‘yung curtain sa glass wall, sinara ko na rin. Sevi was already unbuttoning his polo when I sat on top of him again. I kissed his neck and took his top off. I could feel his bulge in between my legs. In just a few minutes, I was already moving on top of him.

“Nakaka-tatlo ka na ngayong araw, ah,” Sevi said while buttoning his shirt.

I was retouching my makeup dahil nagulo nang kaunti after what we did. Inayos

ko na rin ang damit ko. I tied my hair in a ponytail so it wouldn’t look too messy. Good thing I was wearing a turtle-neck sweater.

“I’m getting better at moaning quietly now,” I giggled.

“Dapat tinatakpan bibig mo, e,” he chuckled, applying alcohol on his hands before getting his things.

I walked towards him and helped him fix his hair before tiptoeing to give him

a soft kiss. He pinched my cheeks before leaving my office. Bumalik na rin ako

sa table ko para mag-trabaho. I was blushing and grinning while working. What

a nice day!

The next day was a Saturday. May schedule kami ni Sevi para sa inuman mamaya

kasama sila Sam so I basically just waited all day to prepare. Nag-takeout na

lang kami para wala kaming liligpitin.

“So baka wala si Luna later?” I asked Sevi while I was brushing my teeth

inside the bathroom. He was still in the shower.

“Ewan ko lang! Sungit ni Kalix!” He yelled from the shower.

“Oh, the hottie,” I giggled.

“Naririnig kita!”

Tumawa lang ako bago nagmumog. I went outside the bathroom and entered the

walk-in closet so I could pick something to wear. I was staring at my closet

for so long. Should I wear a dress? Or what?

I ended up wearing a white tube, a pair of maong ripped jeans with black Gucci

belt, and black high-heeled boots. I tied my hair in a high ponytail and put

on a pair of earrings and a necklace. I decided to just bring a small white

purse. Besides, I wouldn’t need anything but my wallet, alcohol, handkerchief,

and a lipstick.

“Wow,” Sevi’s mouth formed an ‘o’ when he entered the room. He was only

wearing a towel on his hips. Basa pa ang buhok at tumutulo sa dibdib.

“Get dressed na. Baka ma-late tayo,” I told him while putting makeup.

He took his towel off and placed it on the couch while picking something to wear. I shamelessly surveyed his body before biting my lower lip. God, nakabihis na ‘ko! Stop it, Elyse! It took me a lot to fight the urge to touch him.

Sevi just ended up wearing a white dress shirt with three buttons opened to reveal his chest and metal necklace, and a pair of grey pants. He buckled his black belt before folding the sleeves of his dress shirt until his elbows to put on a silver watch.

“We’re taking your car?” I asked.

“Siyempre. Malamang lasing ka mamaya,” he insulted. “‘Yung alcohol tolerance mo mas mababa pa sa grades ko noong college.”

“Hey, excuse me! Malakas na ‘ko ngayon!” I said proudly, like it was true.

“Eksh kyush me, malakash na ‘ko ngayen,” he mocked me and made a face.

Sumimangot ako at kinuha na ang bag ko. I blow-dried Sevi’s hair before he applied wax on them, styling his hair a bit. I pouted. He looked so attractive. What a head-turner. I was sure girls would flock on him in the club. He applied perfume before we left the unit.

It was around 10:30 PM when we arrived there. We were late. 10 PM ang usapan,

e, but medyo traffic, though kami ang pinakamalapit sa club. Pagkarating

namin, sinalubong kami ng employee ni Sam para dalhin sa reserved table. It

was on the second floor.

“Oh my gosh, hi guys!” Samantha stood up when they saw us. “Late kayo, ha! Hi

Elyse!”

Samantha gave me a kiss on the cheek and pulled on my hand until we reached

the couch. Sevi went out when he heard that Arkin was downstairs. Naiwan tuloy

ako sa girls! I haven’t seen them for a very long time so I didn’t know how to

act.

“Hi!” Via stood up and gave me a friendly hug. She looked so gorgeous. She was

wearing a white off-shoulder blouse, revealing her abdomen, and a pair of

black jeans partnered with silver heels. Her hair was in a half-ponytail.

“Oh, I thought you left for Spain?” I asked her. That’s what I heard from

Sevi.

“Change of plans. Si Luna kasi, e,” she chuckled before sitting down. “Upo

ka.”

“Hi,” I awkwardly greeted Kierra who just took a shot.

“Hello!” She gave me a smile before pouring another one so she could give it

to me. “Kumusta? Shot ka muna! Welcome shot!”

“Where are the others?” I asked her. She was wearing a black short dress. Her

hair was in a ponytail.

“Oh, si Luna, susunod daw. Si Yanna, papunta pa lang. Hayaan mo na ‘yun.

Palagi namang late ‘yun, jusko,” she laughed, rolling her eyes. “Shot na!”

I was about to drink the shot when a woman suddenly got it out from my hand. I

sighed heavily and rolled my eyes when I saw Yanna. Binottoms-up niya ‘yung

shot at nilapag sa lamesa, creating a noise.

She was wearing a velvet bralette and black skirt. It emphasized her boobs.

Napatingin tuloy ako sa dibdib ko, na-conscious bigla. What the hell. Is it

because she already gave birth or what?

“Hey,” Hiro greeted, his hand on Yanna’s waist. He was wearing a black button-

down polo that was tuck inside his dark maong jeans. He was wearing a designer

leather belt and a silver bracelet.

“Hi, Hiro,” I smirked, standing up.

“Hoy,” Yanna warned me. “Ano ‘yan?”

“Pahiram. One night lang,” I whispered on Yanna’s ear before laughing.

“Si Sevi, nasaan?” Yanna suddenly asked Sam.

“O, ano na naman kailangan mo?” Sevi suddenly came, walking towards my

direction. He stopped when he saw Hiro beside Yanna.

“Hey,” Hiro greeted him.

“Uy,” Sevi gave him a light nod before sitting beside me, putting his hands on

my waist to pull me closer to him.

Hiro chuckled before whispering something to Yanna, which made her laugh.

Umupo na rin sila sa other side ng couch at kumuha ng bote para inumin. Via

stood up and talked to Sam before she left. Hindi ko alam kung saan siya

pupunta. Baka sasayaw sa baba or what.

“I invited Shan,” Hiro told Sam. “Is that okay?”

Nasamid ako bigla sa iniinom ko nang marinig ko name ni Kuya. Sevi gave me a

shot like it was a damn water to cure my throat! Ininom ko na lang ‘yon at

kumuha ng lemon.

“Yeah, sure!” Sam answered. “I guess? I guess it’s okay? Right, guys?”

“No,” I answered honestly. “Awkward!”

“True,” Kierra chuckled before taking another shot.

I placed the glass back on the table and looked on the left when I saw a woman

walking towards our direction. It was Luna. She was smiling so widely.

She was wearing a white silk tank top and a brown leather skirt partnered with

brown heels. Her hair was in an elegant bun with few strands left out on the

side of her face. Nakipagbeso sila kila Sam. She looked so excited.

“Ay kike!” She almost fell so napahawak siya sa braso ni Kalix.

“Careful,” Kalix said, holding Luna up.

He was wearing a charcoal grey dress shirt with a black coat and a pair of

black slacks. He looked professional. He fixed his sleeves, revealing his

designer watch. His hair was pushed back. He looked so tall beside Luna.

“Kalix,” Hiro stood up to greet him. Sevi suddenly massaged his head, getting

stressed out now. I laughed and asked him what was wrong but he just shook his

head.

“Sam, baka may gusto kang idagdag dito,” sabi bigla ni Sevi kay Sam.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Sam giggled.

“Kuya!” Napatayo kaagad ako nang makita siya. Oh my gosh! I suddenly felt

nervous!

“Nanganganib na buhay ko. Kapag nawala na lang ako bigla mamaya, tumawag ka ng

pulis,” Sevi whispered on me.

“Hey, I won’t stay here for too long,” my brother told Hiro. “I’m busy with a

case.”

My brother greeted Kalix. After that, he gave me a soft kiss on the cheek

before giving Sevi a nod, and then he sat beside Kalix to talk about

something. Wala akong naintindihan and they were seated far away from our

side.

“I’ll just go to the restroom and maybe try to find Via,” paalam ni Kierra

bago tumayo.

“Yeah, sure,” I pursed my lips and watched her leave.

“Drink up, guys! Ang bagal niyo uminom!” Samantha came back holding three more

bottles, placing them on the table. She sat beside me and Yanna stood up to

sit beside her. Luna whispered something to Kalix before she sat on my other

side.

“I didn’t recognize you last time. Sorry. Hindi kita nakita nang malapitan,”

Luna smiled at me. “Maybe because of your hair. Ang ganda ng buhok mo! Ang

healthy pa rin niya tignan!”

“Thank you and congratulations,” I smiled back at her.

“Hoy, shot mo na,” Yanna gave Luna a shot glass.

“Anong ako? Boba!” Luna rolled her eyes.

“Ah, mali. Lumiko. Ikaw pala, Elyse. Shot mo na ‘to,” Yanna suddenly gave me

the shot glass.

I didn’t want to be killjoy so ininom ko na lang. I had to hang out with

Sevi’s friends! Sevi was there with the boys. Oh, Arkin was with him na, kaya

pala ang daming tumitingin sa side nila. May kakampi siya.

“I’m going now,” my brother ruffled my hair.

“Oh, that fast?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’m busy,” he greeted the other girls before leaving.

Sevi was seated on the armrest of the couch, and Arkin was standing in front

of him. Beside Arkin was Hiro. Kalix was seated on the couch, holding a glass.

They looked like they were having a stupid meeting.

“Congratulations, Luna and Elyse! Cheers!” Sam brought her glass up.

Kailangan kong makipag-sabayan sa kanila but they were so wild, except Luna,

of course. Water lang ang iniinom niya. Kierra and Via came back and joined

the party so mas na-pressure ako! Another drink after a drink! Sunod-sunod!

Another guy came with the guys. ‘Yung nag-hatid sa’min ni Ida last time. He

was laughing when he saw Kalix, and suddenly nasama na siya sa meeting. There

was another man who came. I wasn’t familiar with him. And another one. Bakit

ang dami naman nilang kakilala?!

“What the hell,” I whispered when I saw a group of girls walking towards our

couch.

I saw how Hiro showed his hand to the woman. Sevi stood up from the arm rest

and moved away to exit himself. Kalix looked so unapproachable so no one dared

to talk to him. Si Arkin lang ang nag-entertain for pictures. The other guys

were busy talking.

“Nahihilo na ‘ko,” I pouted, holding my head.

“Now is the right time to dance! Let’s go!” Samantha pulled my hand up.

“Hoy, Sam, wait. Hilo ako pag-tayo ko, girl,” Kierra laughed. “Luna, tara na!

Ako bahala sa ‘yo, promise!”

“Dalian niyo, ang tagal!” Nangunguna na si Yanna.

“Uy, sure ba kayong kaya niyo? Baka naman mag-kalat kayo sa baba,” Via looked

so worried for us.

Sam clung on my arm to pull me away from the couch. Luna was talking to Kierra

while Via was trying to pull Yanna back.

“Where are you going?” We stopped when Kalix suddenly asked. He raised a brow

and looked at Luna.

“Sa baba lang! We’ll be careful with her, promise!” Kierra said, pulling Luna

away again.

We went downstairs to dance. I moved my hips with the sound of music, trying

to blend in with the people. I felt drunk so I was so impulsive with my

actions. Samantha brought a bottle of tequila and she started pouring it on

our mouth. I held my head again, feeling dizzy.

“Okay ka lang ba? Balik na kaya tayo roon?” Via held my arm.

“I’m fine!” I gave her a nod. “Promise! Promise!”

A couple of guys were already making their way through our direction. Nabunggo

ko pa ‘yung isa so I stepped back. I looked at the second floor and saw Sevi

leaning against the railings, watching. Beside him was the other guys. Some

were laughing and some looked so serious.

I danced again with the girls, ignoring the guys around us. A guy tried to

grab Yanna’s arm but Samantha pulled her away. Via was just watching me, in

case I would suddenly fall on the floor because of too much alcohol.

When we came back, the other guys were nowhere to be found. Si Sevi, Kalix,

and Hiro na lang ang naiwan doon. Sevi was already seated on the couch. I

smiled and went towards him to sit on his lap. His eyes widened and tried to

put me next to him but I leaned my back against his chest and closed my eyes.

The world was spinning again.

“Oh, lasing ka na?” Sevi put his arms on my waist.

“Lasing ka na, Elyse?” Yanna asked, laughing. “Tama! May tanong ako! Masarap

ba humalik si Sevi?”

“Gago ka ba?” Sevi asked her.

“Of course! And in bed, too!” I giggled, drunk.

I heard some ‘oooh’s from the girls. I saw how the side of Hiro’s lips rose up. Luna covered her ears and shook her head, looking disgusted but still laughing. Kalix let out a chuckle before drinking another glass. Luna was already beside him.

“Paano siya sa kama, Elyse?” Yanna asked again, enjoying this.

Sevi tried to cover my mouth but I pulled his wrist away so I could talk. “Why would I tell you, huh?! This conversation is just making me miss sex. Gosh, buti na lang wala na si Kuya! Hiro, don’t tell him about this!”

“Tama na. Uuwi ko na ‘to,” Sevi pushed me up and stood up to get my things.

“Hey, ang KJ!” Samantha stopped him. “Elyse, lights on or lights off?”

“Dim lights!” I answered, almost falling back on the couch. Good thing Sevi was holding my arm.

“Ay puta, may pa-dim lights,” Yanna laughed again. She was holding a glass of blue margarita on her hand.

“E, ikaw ba?” Kierra asked.

“Ako, lights on. Para kitang kita, girl,” Yanna gave her a wink. Hiro massaged

the bridge of his nose, getting embarrassed.

“Sex or chocolates?” Samantha asked me again.

“Ano ba ‘yan, Sam? Uuwi na kami,” Sevi wanted so bad to go home but he was

being cornered by his friends.

“Si Sevi ba first kiss mo?” Via asked me.

“Yes! But I’m not his first kiss!” Sumimangot ako. “I don’t know who! He

wouldn’t tell me!”

Yanna suddenly choked on her margarita. She sat beside Hiro like a prim and

proper woman. Luna and Kierra just kept on laughing like all of them

understand the joke. What is the joke? Why is it funny? I don’t get it.

“Yanna, parang nanahimik ka ata,” Luna laughed.

“Huh? Lasing na ata ako,” Yanna held her head, leaning against Hiro.

My brows furrowed, getting confused. Napailing si Sevi at hinawakan ang braso

ko para hatakin na ‘ko paalis doon.

“I love you guys!” I sent a flying kiss. “I love you all! I love you, my

friends! I had so much fun today!”

“We love you, too,” Samantha laughed at me.

“Luna, I’m sorry I was jealous of you. Kierra, I feel a little awkward but I

love you! Via, you’re so patient and amazing! Sam, I love you, my friend!

Yanna, I fucking hate you,” I glared at her. “But I still love you! Waa, I

love you, all!”

“She’s fucking wasted,” Hiro shook his head.

“Salamat, Sam. Alis na kami, Luna, Ke, Via, Yanna,” Sevi waved before pulling

me away. “Attorney, Cap,” paalam ni Sevi bago umalis.

“And you! I love you!” I pinched Sevi’s cheeks.

“I love you,” he nodded. “Tara na.”

When we arrived at the unit, I passed out on the bed. The next morning, my

head was hurting so bad! Napaupo ako sa kama at hinimas ang ulo ko. Naka-bra

and panty lang ako but it was fine. I stood up and went inside the bathroom to

wash my face. I noticed that I wasn’t wearing makeup anymore but my hair still

smelled like liquor and smoke.

When I went out of the bedroom, Sevi was already seated on the dining table,

sipping on his coffee. He was wearing nothing but pajamas and he was glaring

at me! Wala akong maalala! Why is he mad?!

“Hi,” I gave him a cute smile after getting a yogurt inside the fridge. “What

happened last night?”

“Ah, hindi mo maalala?” He raised a brow.

“Uh, I remember a little bit,” I sat in front of him. “I was dancing.. and

then I went back to the couch.. and we were playing fast talk?”

“Oo, tapos sabi ka nang sabi na gusto mo ng sex,” he nodded, chuckling.

“What?!” My eyes widened. “Hey, don’t lie! I did not say that! Not in front of

everyone?!”

“Talaga lang, ah,” he sarcastically said. “Tapos noong inuwi kita rito, halik

ka nang halik sa ‘kin hanggang sa makatulog ka na lang bigla. Akala ko nga

patay ka na, e. Isusugod na sana kita sa hospital kaso nag-hilik ka bigla-”

“Hey, I don’t snore! You liar!” I glared at him.

“Malakas ka na uminom, huh,” he scoffed. “Nabilang ko shot mo! 17!”

“What? Why the hell are you counting? Wait, you were watching me?!” I pouted.

“Oo naman. Dinuduga ka na nga ni Yanna, e. Hindi mo napapansin,” Sevi laughed.

“Lasing ampucha.”

He just kept on teasing me the whole day. My hangover was so bad I had to

sleep again! I woke up around 4 PM when I felt Sevi beside me. He was taking a

nap, too. He put his arms on my waist and pulled me closer to him. I closed my

eyes again to sleep.

The next day was Monday so we were back to work. I attended a board meeting

before going inside my office again for lunch. Austin and his dad wanted to

have lunch with me so we ate inside my office. Tito Anthony was talking about

the engagement rumors again.

“It was still going around. I see, you’re now wearing a ring. Have you already

agreed to Austin’s proposal?” Tito Anthony chuckled, looking at my ring.

“No, this is not from him,” I looked at Austin again. He was quiet. Hindi niya

‘ko masyadong kinakausap for the past few days. “I am already engaged to

another guy, Tito.”

“What?” Tito Anthony’s lips parted.

“I’m full now,” Austin stopped eating. Niligpit niya ang pinagkainan niya at

nilagay ulit sa paper bag. “Dad, can we talk?”

“Excuse me, Elyse,” Tito Anthony stood up and followed Austin outside the

office.

I shook my head and finished my food before going back to work. I decided to

go home around 4 PM. Tumayo ako at niligpit ang gamit ko. Sevi and I were

supposed to go grocery shopping after work so maaga kaming umuwi pareho.

When I went inside the unit, he wasn't there yet. I placed my heels back on

the shelf, including my bag, before leaving the room. Saktong paglabas ko,

kakarating lang ni Sevi. I was about to talk but he was talking to someone on

the phone.

"Ano? Hindi kita marinig," Sevi looked so frustrated. "Gumuho?! Paano nangyari

'yon?! Hindi ba 'yan tinignan ni Engineer Ramos?! Anong materyales ba 'yung

ginamit niyo? Anong bago? Anong.. E, sino ba kasing nag-sabing simulan niyo

'yan habang wala ako?!"

"W-what?" My lips parted.

"Nasa Makati ako, diba? Paanong pumayag si Engineer Ramos, diyan?! Anak ng!

Ako 'yung maiipit dito. Lima 'yung sinugod sa hospital?! Anong gagawin natin

ngayon?" Sevi pulled on his hair with so much frustration.

My heart started beating so fast. Napatalon ako nang mag-ring ang phone ko.

Austin was calling. I answered it and went inside the bedroom.

[Emergency meeting, Elyse. Something happened in Batangas. You need to go back

here.] He informed me.

“W-why? What happened?” I was so nervous.

[We’re taking Engineer Camero off the project. I just want to let you know.]

:)

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“Let’s not make any rash decision as of the moment.”

I massaged my head and started tapping my pen lightly on the table while

having a meeting with the executives and managers of each department. We were

still waiting for the representatives of Valeria Construction so we can get

their statement. Architect Rosario already informed us beforehand about what

happened.

“Engineer Camero and I already talked about getting new materials like what we

discussed last meeting and Miss Ledezma approved. Engineer Ramos allegedly

approved the usage of the old materials, risking the safety of five workers.

She said she was confused. May miscommunication daw po sila ni Engineer

Camero," Architect Rosario showed the pictures of the site.

She stopped talking when the door opened and it revealed the C.E.O of the

Valeria Group. It was Luna's mom, I think. She was wearing a beige dress with

a belt on the waist and her hair was in a bun. She didn't have any reaction at

all. Sevi and her secretary were behind her and together with Sevi were

Engineer Ramos and Engineer Lavin.

"Good afternoon. Apologies for what happened today," Mrs. Valeria went to her

seat. "Since we are already talking about what happened, care to share,

Engineer Ramos?"

Engineer Ramos nodded before they went to their seats. I sighed and avoided

Sevi's eyes. He looked so damn stressed and guilty. I pursed my lips and just

waited for Engineer Ramos to talk.

"I apologize deeply for what happened today. Engineer Camero told me that new

materials will be delivered earlier this morning but the old ones came because

the company failed to cancel the delivery. I thought there were sudden

changes,” Engineer Ramos looked down.

“Engineer ka. Dapat alam mo ‘yung pinagkaiba, ‘di ba?” Sevi said, looking so

pissed. “Tsaka in-assign kita pero dapat tinawagan niyo muna ako bago niyo

sinimulan.”

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t listening to the.. the meeting, Engineer,” Engineer Ramos

refused to look at us.

“At hindi ka man lang nag-consult kay Engineer Lavin?” Sevi looked at Engineer

Lavin.

“Wala akong alam, Engineer,” Engineer Lavin sighed.

“Napakarami niyo roon, ah? Ni isa sa inyo, walang nag-abalang tawagan ako?”

Sevi massaged his head and sighed heavily.

“Akala ho namin okay na kasi si Engineer Ramos ang nag-sabi,” Engineer Lavin

pursed his lips. “Ang alam ko lang may pinadalang pitong tauhan sa site.

Pumayag si Engineer Ramos. Ngayon, ‘yung lima, nasa hospital.”

“Ano? Sinong nagpadala?” Kumunot ang noo ni Sevi.

“Ikaw daw, Engineer,” Engineer Lavin looked at him.

“What is happening? Order, please,” I said, trying to take the pressure down.

They were obviously arguing during the meeting. Baka ito rin ang first time

nilang mag-usap. I was getting so stressed out.

“Enough,” Mrs. Valeria told them. “There seems to be a problem in

communication. You don’t need to worry about this, Ms. Ledezma. Our company

will pay for all the damages, hospital bills, and materials. This will never

happen again.”

“Is it possible to take Engineer Camero off the project? I believe he was

negligent,” Austin suddenly talked. “It was stated in the contract. We can

request another engineer for the project.”

Sevi licked his lower lip and looked at Austin like he was trying so hard not

to punch him. He sighed and looked away, massaging the bridge of his nose. I

pursed my lips and played with my pen, thinking.

“I haven’t approved of that yet, Mr. Guerrero,” I glared at him.

“Of course you won’t, Miss Ledezma. He is your damn fiancÃ©,” galit na hinampas

ni Austin ang lamesa.

“Excuse me?” My brows furrowed.

I heard some whispers inside the room. Sevi bit his lower lip and shook his

head a little, whispering something to Engineer Lavin. Mrs. Valeria looked at

Sevi with questioning eyes. The executives were already looking at me with

confusion.

“You still trust that guy? Paano kapag opening na ng resort at saka gumuho

ulit? Maraming tao ang maaapektuhan at sasagutin ng kumpanya natin ‘yon. It

would tarnish our company name. Just for once, think about the reputation of

our company that we are all trying to keep!” Austin yelled at me.

“Excuse me, Mr. Guerrero, I believe you do NOT have the right to raise your

voice at me,” I glared at him. “This is my company. I care about it. I hire

the best people to keep the reputation-”

“You are just purposely doing this to destroy the company that your father

built because you hate him!” Austin stood up.

My lips parted when he suddenly brought up my family problem. Some employees

looked away, whispering. I couldn’t help but let out a scoff, staring at him.

He looked like he didn’t even regret saying that.

I stood up and looked at him with so much rage. I slowly walked towards him

and grabbed his collar.

“I am expecting your resignation letter tomorrow,” mariing sabi ko bago ko siya binitawan. “Leave this fucking room. Right. Now.”

No one dared to talk. All of them stared at Austin. Some were confused and some looked at him with pity. Austin inhaled a large amount of breath before getting his things and leaving the room. I remained standing there, trying to calm myself.

“Well,” Mrs. Valeria coughed before standing up. “We will ask the legal team of our company to investigate the site. We will keep in touch. For now, the project will be passed down to Engineer Lavin while Engineer Ramos and Engineer Camero are both in question. Is that okay?”

“Yes. Thank you, Mrs. Valeria,” I bowed to her before they left the room.

I sat in front of the table again to assign additional work to the heads, reminding them about the adjustments. Hindi na ‘ko makapagsalita nang maayos sa sobrang galit ko kay Austin. I felt like all of my blood went to my head.

“No one will talk about this outside the company. Adjourned,” I stood up and got my things before leaving the room.

I went straight home. Sevi did not go home that night but he texted me that he

will stay in Engineer Lavin’s house for the meantime. His text was dry. I was

worried about him but I also wanted to be alone that night.

Austin told everyone that Sevi and I were engaged. He also talked about my

problem with my father. Those two will affect my reputation in the company. I

was worried that people will lose their trust on me. Baka isipin nilang kaya

ako C.E.O para madaling sirain ang kumpanya. I was so stressed out I couldn’t

sleep.

The next day, I was late to work. I was just wearing a pair of grey slacks,

white heels, and maroon blouse. Some employees looked away when they saw me. I

could hear their whispers but I chose to ignore it. I took my shades off when

I entered the office.

“Have you seen Mr. Guerrero?” I asked Alice.

“Yes, Ma’am. He went to work earlier this morning,” Alice gave me a small

smile.

The fucking audacity of that man! I pursed my lips and asked her to leave my

office before going back to work. I got my phone out and tried to call Sevi

but he wasn’t answering. Maybe he also needed to be alone at this moment. I

sighed and put my phone down. I started writing a report to the board about

what happened in Batangas.

I went home around 7 PM. Pagkabukas ko pa lang ng unit, napansin ko nang bukas

ang mga ilaw. Meaning, Sevi was already home. I sighed in relief before going

inside the walk-in closet to put my bag and shoes. I stopped when I saw a

black duffel bag on the sofa. May mga damit ni Sevi roon na hindi pa nakaayos.

“Hey,” I nervously glanced at Sevi when he entered the room. “You’re leaving?”

“Saglit lang. Babalik din ako,” he couldn’t look at me.

“W-why? Where are you going?” I tried to catch his gaze but he refused to look

at me or even face my direction. “Hey, is there a problem?”

He stopped getting clothes and just held on to the cabinet tight. He looked

down and sighed heavily in defeat before looking at me with so much pain and

guilt.

“Elyse, I’m sorry,” he looked like he wanted to cry.

“W-why? Why are you saying sorry?” I was so confused.

“Napapahamak ka sa trabaho dahil sa ‘kin,” he looked away, biting his lower

lip. “‘Yung pangalan mo, nadudumihan na dahil sa ‘kin. Ang dami ko nang

kasalanan sa ‘yo.”

“Sev, I will fix it! Don’t worry about me!” I held his arm to pull him towards

me. “I am fine. I am doing just fine, okay?”

“Kinakain na ‘ko ng..” His voice broke. “..ng guilt sa lahat ng nangyayari sa

‘yo.”

“What?” My brows furrowed.

“‘Yung sa Mommy mo,” Sevi covered his eyes when a tear fell down.

Nabitawan ko bigla ang braso niya. My lips parted as the tears started to pool

on the corner of my eyes. I looked away and tried to control my breathing. I

was reminded of my mom again.. and everything that happened.

“It wasn’t your fault,” I whispered.

“Hindi ko kasalanan lahat, Elyse, pero may kasalanan ako. Alam mo ‘yun,” he

sat on the couch, covering his face. “At ‘yung ngayon.. Eto nanaman. Paano

kung ako pala talaga ‘yung dahilan ng bawat pagbagsak mo?”

“Do you think I’m weak? Do you think people, including you, can just easily

destroy me? With this?” My brows furrowed.

I have been through so much that it was already too much for me, but I handled

it. I came back stronger than ever. No one could ever destroy me again like

what my dad did because they won't like my payback.

"Tama naman sila. Naging pabaya ako sa nangyari sa Batangas," he nodded.

"Kasalanan ko 'yun, Elyse."

"No, it wasn't. Stop it! Stop blaming yourself! It was just a mistake-"

"Pero limang tao 'yung muntik nang mamatay! Hindi pwedeng magkamali sa mga

bagay na ganito!" He looked at me. I could tell that he wasn't just talking

about what happened in Batangas. He was talking about what happened with my

mom. His mistake.. that caused my mom's death.

"Stop putting all the blame on yourself. Engineer Ramos made a mistake.

Engineer Lavin made a mistake. Your team made a mistake while you were away.

You need to take responsibility for it, yes, but it wasn't your entire fault.

Do you understand me?!" I was getting frustrated. "Sev, we need to be strong!

Don't let this destroy you because for me, you are the best fucking engineer

out there!"

“At paano naman ikaw?” He stood up and went to me. “Anong mawawala sa ‘yo?”

“Marami na,” taas-noo ko siyang tinignan. “And that made me stronger today so

this.. This whole thing won’t make me fucking shake anymore. I will deal with

this. You just have to trust me. And what happened with my mom.. It was over.

I already accepted it. No need to go over it again and again because it will

just hurt me more!”

“Bakit ba hindi ka na lang magalit sa ‘kin?” He whispered.

“Because I love you,” I started crying. “Weren’t you also mad at me for what

happened with your mom? But look at you. You are still here. Why?”

“Kasi mahal kita,” he pursed his lips, looking away.

“And we forgive the people we love so fast no matter how painful it is, unless

they’re monsters,” I thought about my dad. “Because that’s how they will

learn. Sev, I.. I love my mother so much and I know that she loved you, too.”

“Pero hindi na ngayon,” he looked up with tears in his eyes.

“My mom had the purest heart in the world and I could tell that she would

never blame you for what happened to her. It was never your fault. You were

mad. You were emotional. What happened before is so different to what is

happening right now so please, just let it go.. because I already did."

"Hindi pa," he shook his head. "Hindi mo pa pinapakawalan, Eli."

"What?" My lips parted.

"Galit ka pa rin. Malungkot ka pa rin. Sinisisi mo pa rin sarili mo," he

looked at me and pointed at my heart. "Nakikita ko 'yon sa 'yo pero alam kong

'yung galit na 'yun 'yung nagpapatatag sa 'yo kaya hindi madaling pakawalan."

"I don't need this. Please don't talk about this," I looked away, remembering

my dad. "I could tell that you want me to go and see him but I couldn't, Sev.

I can't."

"Naiintindihan ko," he nodded. "Kaya sana maintindihan mo rin ako kung bakit

hindi ko pa kayang pakawalan ang nangyari sa Mommy mo."

He stood up and went to me to give me a tight hug. I bit my lower lip and

tried to stop myself from crying on his chest.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "Balang araw, mahal. Balang araw, magiging malaya

rin tayo sa lahat ng 'to."

He said that before leaving. That night, I sat on the bed, thinking about

myself.. How I’ve been acting lately. It took me a lot of time to reflect. Hindi na ‘ko nakatulog nang maayos. It was good that Sevi left for the night because I needed to be alone. It was the same for him.

From: Sevi

Hindi kita iiwan. Pupunta lang akong Batangas para tignan ‘yung site.

I bit my lower lip. A tear fell on the phone screen.

Hindi kita iiwan.

From: Sevi

Mahal na mahal kita.

The next day, I went to work early. I was expecting a resignation letter but Austin still came to work. Even after 3 days, he was still there. Hindi rin umuwi si Sevi. He stayed in Batangas.

It was around 11 AM when I went out of the office to go to the board room. I

called the executives again and the heads of each department to ask for updates. It was not a very formal meeting. I was just seated in front, listening to some proposals. I was a bit distracted, lalo na’t naroon din si Austin sa meeting.

“Didn’t I ask you to resign?” I asked him.

“Why can’t you fire me, Elyse?” He raised a brow before smirking. “You’re afraid the board will get involved in this, right? Are you scared of my dad?”

“I am not scared of anyone,” I hissed. “You should thank me that I am still

nice to you. Kapag nalaman kong may kinalaman ka sa lahat ng ‘to, you’re

automatically a nobody to me. Don’t test me.”

He pursed his lips and looked away, staying quiet. I inhaled a large amount of

air before listening again to the Operations head. I kept on glancing at

Austin to watch his body language. I could tell that he was a bit nervous.

The Operations head suddenly stopped talking when the door opened. All of us

looked at the man who entered. Napatayo kaagad ako nang makita ang lalaki. He

was wearing a white dress shirt, black coat, and black slacks. He was wearing

specs and may dala siyang black leather briefcase.

“Attorney Kalix Jace Martinez. I’m the lawyer of Valeria Group,” he showed me

his I.D.

“A-attorney!” I panicked a little. He looked so serious. I didn’t know how to

greet him. “Mrs. Valeria informed me that your team has been investigating the

Batangas incident. Are you here to give updates about the investigation? I’m

afraid we are in the middle of a meeting.. right now,” I looked around.

“No, I’m here for Mr. Austin Guerrero,” he looked around the room. “Where is

he?”

“What?” My brows furrowed. “Why?”

Everyone was looking at him and then Austin. Attorney Martinez took a folder

out of his bag and placed it on the table. He opened it and showed me seven

profiles.

“They are not our workers,” he pointed at it. “Five of them are in the

hospital right now because of injuries that they purposely did to themselves..

Well, allegedly. That’s why I need to talk to Mr. Guerrero.”

“He’s there,” I pointed at Austin, glaring at him. “Care to explain why you

are involved in the investigation?”

“I just have a few questions about your relationship with these people, and to

Engineer Ramos,” Attorney Martinez looked at Austin with no emotion at all.

“Why would I answer your fucking questions?” Austin hissed. Nagbulungan na ang

mga tao.

“I am not forcing you to come with me and answer my ‘fucking’ questions to

prove your innocence but note that this will just make you even more

suspicious. My team is already looking into it and we are requesting your full

cooperation on this matter. If you don’t, then maybe we’ll just see each other

in court,” Kalix took the folder and his bag, a sign that he was ready to

leave.

“I will go,” Austin stood up and got his things.

“That’s what I thought,” Kalix gestured Austin to follow him and then they

left the room.

I waited outside Austin’s office while he was talking to Attorney Martinez. My

heart was beating so fast. I didn’t know but I was really hoping that he

wasn’t involved to this. I treated him as a friend and I trusted him a bit..

Why would he do this to me? To Sevi? I wanted so bad to find a right reason

for it but I just couldn’t see one.

Napatayo ako nang bumukas ang pinto. Attorney Martinez was talking to someone

on the phone but he stopped when he saw me.

“You’re looking at me like I’m a doctor and I just operated on your friend,”

he chuckled, moving his phone down.

“W-what will happen now? Is he.. Is he involved?” I asked nervously.

“He might be,” he shrugged, refusing to give me information. “But our company

might just settle because this issue can affect your company and ours. It’s

better to just keep it between us. I’ll talk to your company lawyer about

this.”

“How about the five people involved? Are they okay?” I asked worriedly.

“They are,” he nodded. “Engineer Ramos might also lose her license. The

company will deal with our employees.”

“Thank you, Attorney,” I gave him a small smile but the rage inside me was

slowly building up. He was about to leave but stopped when he remembered

something.

“Love, huh?” He raised a brow. “Makes us do the fucking worst.”

My brows furrowed, getting confused. I was about to ask him about it but he

already left. I clenched my fist before entering Austin’s office with so much

anger in my eyes. He was leaning against his table, looking stressed out.

“Why the fuck would you do that?!” I yelled at him after closing the door.

“I didn’t do anything,” he denied, looking straight into my eyes. What a

fucking liar.

“You paid those people, didn’t you? And you probably manipulated Engineer

Ramos to let those people enter the site! You purposely did it! You sabotaged

the project and then you have the fucking audacity to tell me that I don’t

care about the reputation of this company?!” I was so mad my hands were

already shaking.

“If Engineer Camero was competent enough, it wouldn’t even happen,” he

scoffed, trying to justify his actions.

“What kind of thinking do you have?!” I pointed at my head. “Why the hell

would you do that?! You just put our company at risk for messing with Valeria

Group! Do you really think they wouldn’t find out?! That they won’t

investigate?!”

I was starting to get crazy. He was making me so mad and he didn’t even look

like he regretted his actions. He pursed his lips and looked away from me.

“You are no different from my father,” I hissed before walking away.

“I loved you,” I stopped when he suddenly talked.

Lumingon ako sa kanya at naglakad pabalik. I saw how the tears in his eyes

reflected the light. He couldn’t look at me now.

“I loved you, Elyse, I swear but I was so.. I was so pressured by my father.

He wanted me to approach you so we could get married, hoping that the company

would fall into my hands," his voice was shaking. "I didn't know what to do."

"What?" I couldn't even talk. "So you.. you resorted to doing dirty work?"

"I didn't know how to prove that Engineer Camero wasn't the one for you. I

wanted to destroy his name so you would finally give me a chance, and we could

finally be together. I knew malalaman ni Dad na engaged ka na sa iba so I

needed to do something or else he will.. he will take everything away from

me."

"I am taking everything away from you and your dad," I hissed, clenching my

fist. "There is no way to justify your actions-"

"I am not justifying my actions. I know it's wrong, that's why I told Attorney

Martinez that I am ready for what is yet to come. They can sue me. I will face

the charges. And also, here," Austin went to me and gave me a letter.

It was a resignation letter.

"I don't understand," he started crying.

"What do you not understand?" I looked at him.

“I was with you for years. I was there when your mom died. I was there when

you wanted so bad to hurt your dad. I was there when you were breaking down. I

was there when you needed help in the company. I was there when you got your

position. I was there all along.. Why would you choose him?” He sounded so

desperate. “He was never there.”

“He was never there?” I scoffed. “He was there for five years. Five whole

years, Austin! He was there when I was struggling with my studies, he was

there when I fell in front of everyone during the cheerdance competition, he

was there when I was an intern, he was there when I graduated, he was there

when I needed support..”

My tears started to fall, thinking about everything Sevi and I had been

through. Austin couldn’t talk or even look at me. He was just crying.

“He was there when I got my first job. He was there when I needed someone to

lean on. He was there when I needed comfort. He was there when I was tired. He

was there when I felt like everything was falling apart. He was there.. He

stayed there, when everyone left,” I cried. “And no one.. No one could ever

top that. Not even you.”

“But he hurt you,” his voice was shaking.

“And it’s part of loving someone,” I held his shoulders. “I love him, Austin.

I love him more than anyone in this world because he makes me a better person.

He makes me want to love myself more. He makes me improve. He makes me grow.

Someday, I hope, you will find someone that will love you as much as I love

him because that love is the most beautiful kind of love.”

“I am so sorry,” he whispered, trying to stop the tears from falling. “I loved

you.. Or maybe I still do, but I know the pain I caused you.”

“I hope you will do something to redeem yourself. Something my dad couldn’t

do,” I gave him a soft hug. I tapped his back before letting him go. “I know

you’re not a monster, so do not act like one.”

“If you want to remove my dad as the Chairman of the board, I will help you.

That’s the least I could do,” he said before I left the room.

I walked back to my office to get my things. All I could think about was Sevi.

I knew he was also suffering right now. I wanted to be there for him. I

realized a lot of things today. Everything came back to me.

“Hey, where are you? Can we talk?” I called Sevi.

[Nasa kumpanya pa ‘ko. Bakit?] He sounded tired.

“Valeria Group? I’m on my way there,” I ended the call.

I went to the parking and drove myself to their company. It was not that far pero dahil sa traffic, medyo natagalan pa. I talked to the receptionist and showed her my I.D. Nang makita niyang C.E.O ako, hinatid pa niya ‘ko sa elevator. Siya pa ang pumindot ng floor ng Engineering department.

When the elevator opened, I was welcomed by engineers walking around the floor, looking so busy. Some were seated at their cubicles and some were having a meeting. Majority of them looked at me when they saw me so I felt awkward.

“Engineer Camero?” I asked.

About ten of them pointed at the door all at once, still staring at me. I chuckled before walking. Nakita ko na kaagad ang pintuan ng office ni Sevi.

Engr. Sebastian Vincent Camero

Engineering Department Head

I was about to enter the office when I heard Bianca’s voice inside. Napatigil ako at nanatili sa labas kahit medyo nabuksan ko na ang pinto. I could clearly

hear their voices now.

“I swear, hindi ko kayang gawin sa ‘yo ‘yun, Sevi,” Engineer Ramos sounded

like she was crying. “Oo, aaminin ko, naging pabaya ako. Hindi ko chineck

‘yung mga I.D, ‘yung materials, kasi hindi tayo nagkaintindihan sa

instructions pero hindi ko sinadya lahat ng ‘yun!”

“Hindi ko alam kung maniniwala ba ‘ko sa ‘yo,” Sevi sounded mad. “Kung alam ko

lang na gagawin mo ‘yon, sana si Theo na lang ang in-assign ko.”

“Tangina naman. Mahal kita, paano ko magagawa ‘yun sa ‘yo?!” Bianca broke

down.

The room was suddenly filled with silence. Sevi sounded like he didn’t know

what to say anymore and Bianca just kept on crying.

“Masyado ata akong natuwa dahil sa ‘kin mo in-assign.. Ibig sabihin may tiwala

ka sa ‘kin kahit wala akong tiwala sa sarili ko. Alam kong hindi ko kaya. Alam

kong wala pa ‘kong masyadong alam pero pinagkatiwalaan mo ‘ko at masaya ako

roon. Akala ko rin.. Akala ko pinili mo ‘ko dahil baka nagugustuhan mo na

‘ko,” Bianca continued talking.

“May girlfriend ako,” seryosong sabi ni Sevi.

“Alam ko naman ‘yun,” she cried again. “Alam ko naman pero anong magagawa ko?

Ilang taon na ‘kong umaasa sa ‘yo, siguro naman okay lang umasa ulit?”

“Pasensya ka na,” Sevi sighed. “Hindi kita kayang magustuhan. Sana

maintindihan mo ‘yon.”

“Alam ko na ngayon, Engineer Camero. Huwag kang mag-alala, pero sana naman

maniwala ka sa ‘king pumalpak lang talaga ako sa trabaho kaya nangyari ‘yun.

Hindi ko ‘yun sinasadya. Kahit ikaw lang ang maniwala sa ‘kin, kahit hindi na

‘yung iba,” Bianca sobbed. “Kahit ikaw lang.. Pagkatiwalaan mo ‘ko.”

“Hindi na mahalaga ang opinyon ko. Si Attorney Martinez at Mrs. Valeria ang

dapat mong kausapin,” Sevi sighed heavily. “Pero naniniwala ako sa ‘yo. Baka

nagkamali lang din ako. Baka masyado ka lang na-overwhelm sa napakalaking

project na in-assign ko sa ‘yo. Pasensya ka na.”

“Thank you, Engineer Camero,” Bianca said. “Promise, pagbubutihin ko na sa

susunod, kung mananatili man ako rito.. Kung pwede lang at kung hindi mawawala

lisensya ko. Thank you for everything, Engineer.”

Naglakad kaagad ako paalis sa pinto nang marinig na papalabas siya. I

pretended like I was texting when she walked out. Our eyes met but she

immediately walked away. She looked like she cried so much.

Dahan-dahan akong pumasok sa office ni Sevi at nakita siyang nakaupo sa swivel

chair niya at minamasahe ang ulo. His eyes were closed and he was trying to

control his breathing.

“Engineer Camero,” I knocked on the door before closing it behind me.

He opened his eyes and looked at me. Medyo nagulat pa siya nang makita ako at

agad umayos ng upo. I gave him a smile before walking towards him. He put his

hands on my waist, looking up on me while he was seated and I was standing in

front of him.

“Kumusta?” He asked me, giving me a small smile.

“Stop smiling. It looks so fake,” I touched his face. His smile faded.

Napalitan ‘yon ng buntong-hininga.

I sat on his lap and gave him a tight hug. He planted a kiss on my neck before

sighing again. I played with his hair to comfort him.

“Everything will be okay,” I whispered.

“Bakit ka nandito? May trabaho ka, ah,” he held my face and kissed me softly.

“Can you come with me?” I asked, caressing his face.

“Saan?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“I’m going to visit my dad,” I gave him a small smile.

:)

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“Are you ready to face him? It’s okay. I can do this alone.”

Sevi shook his head and pursed his lips, gesturing me to enter the hospital

room. Kuya Roel was at the door, talking to another security guy. I wanted to

come in but my feet kept on stepping backwards, causing my back to hit on

Sevi’s chest. He touched my arms to stop me.

“Hindi mo kaya mag-isa,” he whispered.

“I’m nervous,” I looked at him with worried eyes.

“Huwag kang mag-alala. Narito ako,” he assured me.

I nodded before slowly opening the door. My knees suddenly became weak when I

entered the room and I saw my dad with oxygen mask on. His eyes were closed

and he looked so weak and pale. About 3 bodyguards were there but they left

when they saw me.

I slowly walked towards the bed and my dad maybe felt my presence so he opened

his eyes a little to look at me. I saw how surprised he was but he couldn’t

talk. He had the strength to remove his oxygen mask when he saw me standing

beside him.

“Elyse,” he whispered, looking so shocked.

Sevi sighed heavily before turning his back against us, staying beside the

door. I knew how hard it was for him.. for the both of us but we needed this

in order to let the pain go. I inhaled a large amount of breath to calm

myself.

“You have.. grown.. so much,” hirap na sabi ni Daddy. I saw admiration on his

eyes and the urge to touch my hand but I moved it away.

“I lost my mom 4 years ago,” I told him as tears started to pool on the corner

of my eyes.

He pursed his lips and looked away from me, looking so guilty. I bit my lower

lip, trying my best to continue talking. I wanted to let everything out. My

anger, my pain, everything.

“Because of you. It’s because of you. You manipulative bastard! You killed my

mom. She died after knowing how much of a monster you have become and it

ruined me. It ruined me so bad,” I started crying.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, the tears in his eyes reflecting the light.

“I loved you so much,” I tried to wipe my tears away. “I loved you. You

treated me like a princess. You treated me as the favorite child. How could

you do this to me? How could you do this to my mom?”

“I’m so sorry,” his tears started to fall. “I have no excuse. I have no valid

reason for what I did. I just want to.. say sorry..”

“Sorry?” I scoffed. “Are you aware of how much damage you caused? I needed

to.. I needed to see a damn therapist for my health.. Not just physically but

mentally. No apology could ever bring back what happened! I lost everyone I

loved. Not just my mom, but also you.. The father I used to look up to. You

made me believe that you are kind.. loving.. precious.. But it turns out that

you are just the complete opposite.”

“Believe me, I love you,” he sobbed. “I love you. You are my daughter..”

“If you love me, why would you hurt me?” My voice broke and my hands started

to shake. I saw how Sevi’s head turned to our direction after hearing what I

just said. “How could you.. how could you do that to me?”

“Walang dumaang araw na hindi ko pinagsisisihan lahat, Elyse,” he reached for

my hand. “I regret everything I did to you and to Sebastian’s family.. As much

as I wanted to spend my remaining days in prison, I can’t..”

“I will forgive you.. not because I am ready to accept you again but because I

am so.. so fucking tired of carrying this anger inside me. I am so tired of

getting angry. I want to let go of this, of you, completely,” I touched my

chest, crying. “This is the only way I could feel free.”

“Just the thought of your forgiveness, whatever is the reason, is enough for

me,” he nodded.

“You know what, Dad?” I smiled in pain. “Sometimes, I wish that you are here

beside me like a normal father.. I wish that you would protect me against the

monsters that you hired in the company.. something a dad would do.”

“Is there.. is there something wrong?” He asked, worried.

“If there is, I can handle it. Because I know that my wishes won’t come true..

and my mom raised a brave woman. I don’t need you to protect me anymore,” I

moved my hand away and reached for my bag. “I am going now. I will take your

dear friend out of the board and I will make sure that no one could ever

betray me again like what he did.. like what you did.”

“You are a strong woman, Elyse,” he tried to wipe his tears away but they kept

on falling.

“Eli,” Sevi was suddenly behind me, putting his arms on my shoulder.

“Engineer Camero..” My dad looked so surprised like he didn’t see Sevi enter

the room. His lips parted as he tried to reach for Sevi’s hand. He started

crying again out of regret. “I’m sorry..”

Sevi did not talk but his grip on my shoulder tightened a little bit. He just

stared at my dad with no emotion at all. He pursed his lips and let out a

sigh.

“Huwag kang mag-alala, iingatan ko si Elyse kahit tinarantado mo ang pamilya

ko,” Sevi said calmly. “Hindi ko gagawin sa kaniya ang ginawa mo.”

“Please,” my dad whispered. “Make her happy..”

“I wish you a life that you deserve,” I held my dad’s hand and gave it a

squeeze. “Keep yourself healthy and enjoy your remaining days. I hope you can

leave with a peaceful heart. That’s the kindest thing I could say to you.”

“Please be happy,” my dad told me.

“I am,” I let go of his hand and stepped backwards. “This is goodbye. This may

be the last time we would see each other. Don’t worry about me anymore because

I am happy and well. I feel much better now.”

“Paalam, Sir,” Sevi still said with so much respect before we left the room.

After leaving the room, I almost fell on my knees. Sevi held my elbows up and

gave me a tight hug as I cried so hard on his chest. He caressed my hair and

gave my forehead a kiss, whispering comforting words.

“You did a great job,” sabi niya sa ‘kin.

“Thank you,” I whispered, hugging him back. “For being with me and for not

leaving my side.”

“Kahit ilang beses mo pa ‘kong iwanan, Elyse, mananatili ako rito at

hihintayin kita,” he held my face and gave me a soft kiss. “Kaya huwag kang

mag-alala kasi hindi ako mawawala sa ‘yo.”

I wiped my tears away and looked at Kuya Roel who was standing beside the

door, looking away from us. I chuckled. He just looked so funny.

“Kuya Roel,” I called him.

“Ma’am,” he looked at me so fast like he was just waiting for me to call him.

“You can have the mansion and the car left by my dad. It was transferred to my

name,” I gave him a small smile. “Thank you for your service. You are the

best.”

“Ma’am!” He sounded so surprised. “Hindi ka na uuwi, Ma’am?”

“I will go home right now to get my things. Whatever is left, you can do what

you want with it. My brother already took his things and ‘yung mga gamit ni

Mommy, nasama na sa hukay. If you don’t want the mansion, then I will just

sell it,” I gave him a small smile.

“Hindi, Ma’am.. Pwede ko na roon patirahin ang pamilya ko?” He sounded so

hopeful.

“Akala ko wala kang asawa?” My brows furrowed.

“Asawa wala, Ma’am. Magulang tsaka mga kapatid, mayroon,” he laughed. “Kaso

nasa probinsya ho.”

“Yeah, of course,” I blinked twice. “I’ll take care of the papers.”

“Kung kailangan mo ng tulong sa renovation, Kuya Roel, tawagan mo lang ako,”

Sevi chuckled. “Libre ka sa ‘kin.”

“Maraming salamat, Engineer,” Kuya Roel gave him a small bow.

Like what I said, I went home to the mansion with Sevi. He helped me get my

things. Marami pa ‘kong naiwan. I also opened the safe to get some important

documents. I made sure I wouldn’t leave anything behind.

“Ayaw mo na talaga sa bahay na ‘to?” Sevi sat on my bed.

“Too many memories. I want to start a new life. Besides, wala nang titira

rito. We’ll have our new house soon, right?” I sat on his lap and put my arms

around his neck.

“Oo naman,” he smiled at me, touching my ring finger. “Paano ‘yung Kuya mo?”

“He didn’t even like this place. He treated this as hell. Para nga sa kanya,

maybe staying in hell is better than living here,” I shrugged. “The decision

is on me now.”

“Ang yaman mo na, ah. Pa-balato ka naman diyan,” he joked.

I rolled my eyes before standing up again to get my things. Ilang maleta ang

nilagay namin sa SUV niya. Good thing we brought his car kasi may space sa

likod, unlike mine.

“Bilisan mo!” I crossed my arms over my chest, waiting for him to transfer the

luggage on his car. Hirap na hirap siya.

“Anak ng! Alam kong macho ako pero ang bigat kaya,” he flexed his biceps in

front of me. “Kita mo ‘yan? Nahihirapan din ‘yan, oy.”

“You know what? It’s because you have been using your hand for years,” I

grinned.

“Ang dugyot!” He made a face.

Tumawa lang ako at pinanood siyang buhatin ‘yung mga maleta. After that, he

closed the door and went inside his car. Nakauwi na rin kami before dinner.

Both of us got lazy to cook so we just ordered food while I was fixing my

things. I couldn’t say na tumutulong siya since nanggugulo lang siya.

“Seryoso? Ganito itsura mo noong naging tayo?” He showed me a picture frame I

got from my room. 2nd year pa lang ata ako sa picture na ‘yun.

“What? You got any problem?” I raised a brow.

“Ang atabs!” He said dramatically.

“What?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

“Kaya siguro maraming tumitingin sa ‘tin kapag magkasama tayo! Baka iniisip

nila na mag-Kuya tayo o ano. Ano ba ‘yan, nakakahiya naman. ‘Yun ba iniisip ng

mga tao? Holding hands pa naman tayo palagi,” he looked so concerned for no

reason.

I rolled my eyes and just focused on putting my bags on the shelves. Marami pa

‘kong gamit kaya inusog niya ‘yung iba niyang gamit. I giggled. He told me

that he will put more shelves next week. Sakim daw ako sa space!

“I heard about what happened with Bianca,” I told him.

“Ano?” He looked at me.

“Maybe she has nothing to do with what happened. I believe her. Austin also

did not mention about her. Maybe you could do something about it? Maybe talk

to Attorney Martinez?” I asked him.

“Kami? Mag-uusap?” He let out a laugh. “Hayaan mo na! Magaling naman na

abogado ‘yon. Malalaman niya rin kung may kinalaman ba si Engineer Ramos o

wala. Tiwala lang.”

“I just hope that she won’t lose her license because of this. She worked hard for it,” I sighed heavily.

“Hindi ‘yan,” Sevi looked so confident. “Huwag ka nang mag-alala.”

The next day, I woke up around 5 AM again because of Sevi’s stupid alarm! Inis akong tumayo at kinuha ang shirt niya sa sahig para i-suot. I was just wearing a white panty, gulo-gulo pa ang buhok. I turned the aircon and his alarm off before tying my hair in a bun.

“Love, wake up,” I put my hands on my waist, waiting for him to get up.

He just turned his back against my side. I rolled my eyes before going back to bed. I crawled towards him and put all my weight on top of him. I heard his groan. Parang nawalan siya ng hininga bigla.

“Wake up,” I laughed, still on top of him.

“Ang bigat mo!” Reklamo niya. He tried to push me off.

I laughed before getting off him. I went to the dining with my bowl of cereal and milk. After a few minutes, lumabas na rin siya ng room at umupo sa tapat ko, may dalang tinapay. He didn’t even bother toasting it. Naglagay na lang

siya ng palaman at kinagatan ‘yon.

“Big day today,” I reminded him, smirking.

“Board meeting?” He asked. “Nice! Patalsikin mo ‘yung gagong ‘yun. Katapusan

niya na. Smash them! All troops deployed!”

“You’re getting weirder every day,” I rolled my eyes and continued eating.

“Laro tayo one time lang. Gagawa ako ng bagong account para sa ‘yo,” he tried

to convince me again.

“Shut up,” tumayo na ‘ko pagkatapos kong kumain.

I was showering peacefully when I heard the bathroom door open. I chuckled

when Sevi slid the shower door opened to get inside. He was wearing nothing

now. He tried to adjust the shower head so it would reach him.

“Ooh,” I bit my lower lip, staring at his shaft. I can’t believe kinaya ko

‘yon! My gosh! Mabuti na lang cheerleader ako. I was flexible.

“Hoy, bastos,” he tried to cover it when he saw me staring. “Halika nga rito.”

“Hey! Male-late ako!” I told him when he suddenly hugged me from the back.

“Saglit lang,” he whispered, kissing my neck.

“See? You’re the one hungry here. You always accuse me pa, ah!” I faced him,

wrapping my arms around his neck.

He did not even let me talk again. He just slammed me against the glass wall

and started kissing me. He carried my waist up so I could wrap my legs around

his hips. He put his hand on my side while his other hand was supporting my

weight. In just a few minutes, I was already moaning in the shower.

Good thing it was quick so hindi ako na-late and I even had the time to choose

my outfit. I ended up wearing a beige turtle neck, white cropped-top jacket,

and white leather skirt with a black belt on it. I was also wearing Sevi’s

necklace and a pair of diamond earrings. I put on a light makeup and tied my

hair in a high ponytail.

I put on my black ankle-boots and got my beige hand bag before leaving the

unit. I was wearing my shades when I got off the car. Tuloy-tuloy lang akong

naglakad sa lobby at sumakay sa elevator. No one dared to talk about me.

I went straight to the board room, taking my shades off. The board members

were already there. I sat on my seat and put my bag down. All of them were

staring at me. I was probably the youngest in that room but my presence made

them quiet.

“We are here to discuss the removal of Mr. Anthony Guerrero as the Chairman of

the board,” I announced.

Everyone started to whisper. I fake coughed and everyone went quiet to listen

to me.

“As you have read from the report I sent to your e-mails yesterday, an

incident occurred in Batangas, affecting the construction of our resort. Upon

further investigation, it was proved that Mr. Austin Guerrero right here and

his dad were both involved. I also heard Mr. Guerrero has been doing some

hideous underground crimes that could affect our company. Mr. Guerrero, please

explain to the board,” I gestured Austin to go in front.

I leaned on my chair and played with my pen while listening to Austin. The

board members listened carefully. Some would whisper to each other. Austin’s

dad wasn’t in the meeting at first but I already called him to come and

explain his side if he could.

“Are we removing him from the chairman’s office or from the board entirely?”

Someone asked.

“I am requesting to remove him from the board but to be fair, let us vote for that,” I shifted on my seat and facilitated the voting. I smirked when majority of them voted to remove him from the board.

It was a long tiring meeting. I called Austin’s dad to explain to the board. It was important for me to let the board hear his voice so it would be fair. Of course, he lied just like what I expected but the board did not trust him anymore.

For the next few days, I had our company lawyer settle with Valeria Group. It was the best decision for both our companies. Austin also paid a large amount of money for the damages that he caused, and then he left the company.

“I will start a small business or maybe I’ll migrate,” he told me. “Whatever works for me.”

“That’s good,” I nodded. “I’ll see you soon, I guess?”

“You have been a great boss,” he gave me a small smile. “Thank you, Miss Ledezma.”

I gave him a nod before he left the office, carrying his things. I appointed another employee to take over his position. The next day, the shareholders had

already voted to remove Austin’s dad from the board. Effective immediately. I

also wrote a report about it. So much work! I have been busy for the next few

weeks but still attended Luna’s special event. It was a heartwarming moment to

see everyone so happy.

“Good morning,” I greeted everyone in the room when I came in. All of them

stood up to welcome the C.E.O and the new Chairman of the board, which was me.

I called for a meeting to discuss the changes in the company and to give them

an idea of what happened. I also informed them about what will happen in the

construction of our new resort in Batangas.Â Engineer Ramos wasn’t there

anymore because she was already fired but she didn’t lose her license so I

hoped she felt better.

“Engineer Camero will still handle the project,” I looked at Sevi who was

zoning out during the meeting. “Since we have already settled everything with

VGC. Is that right, Engineer?”

“Yes, Miss Ledezma,” he nodded, staring at me.

“I want the budget report on my table before 3 PM,” I reminded before getting

my things. “Any more questions?”

“Madam,” Alice raised her hand.

“Yes?” My brows furrowed.

“Is it true that you are engaged to Engineer Camero?” She smiled at me na

parang siya ang kinikilig sa aming dalawa.

I looked at Sevi but he was already playing with his lower lip to hide a

smile. He talked to Engineer Lavin beside him, leaving me here to answer the

question! Parang hindi siya involved, ah!

“Yes, we are engaged,” I nodded.

I heard some squealing noises around the room. Napataas ang kilay ko kaya

tumahimik sila ulit. Why were they acting like they were watching a damn

Korean drama?

“No more questions?” I asked and no one talked. “Okay, then. Meeting

adjourned,” I stood up and got my things.

The news started spreading around but I couldn’t care less. Good thing the

responses were positive this time after what happened with Austin. Suddenly,

everyone was on my side now.

“Babe,” Sevi entered my office after the meeting.

“What are you doing here? I thought you’re already on your way back to the

site?” I stood up from my swivel chair to walk towards him.

“Kiss ko muna,” he pouted, holding my waist.

I tiptoed and gave him a soft kiss on the lips but he held my face and kissed

me deeper. He stepped backwards, dragging me with him until his back hit the

door. He swiftly clicked on the lock before he pushed me on the couch and

positioned himself on top of me.

“Hey, I’m at work,” I giggled while he was unbuttoning my blouse. “Is this our

thing now?”

“Tinulugan mo ‘ko kagabi,” reklamo niya bago hinatak ang palda ko pataas,

revealing my panties. I moaned when he suddenly pulled on my panties and dug a

finger inside me without warning!

“Let’s be quick,” I started unbuckling his belt.

“Hindi ka pa ba buntis?” His brows furrowed, halatang nagtataka na. “Dinatnan

ka ba ng dugo mo ngayong buwan?”

“I am taking pills. I already told you that,” I rolled my eyes, laughing.

“I’ll stop taking it after marriage!”

“Okay,” he nodded, kissing my neck. “I love you.”

“I love you, baby,” I whispered, moaning quietly.

The next day, Sevi and I had a very important appointment. I was so nervous

halos hindi na ‘ko makababa sa sasakyan. My knees became weak. I really wanted

to walk but I kept on stepping back.

“Huwag ka na kabahan. Tara na!” Sevi kept on pulling on my hand.

“How do I look? Okay lang ba suot ko?” I looked down on my simple pink

sleeveless dress with a white belt on the waist. “Maybe I shouldn’t have worn

this?”

“Maganda ka na, okay?” Sevi laughed. “Tara na. Naghihintay na sila sa loob.”

“Sev, I’m so nervous I might faint here,” I tried to stop him pero nahatak na

niya ‘ko papasok sa bahay nila.

It was not a mansion but the house was just enough for his family to stay in.

I looked around the living room, admiring the interiors of the house, but Sevi

just kept on pulling on my hand.

“Steven!” Sigaw ni Sevi sa hagdan. “Bumaba ka na rito! Nandito si Elyse!”

“Wait lang!” I heard a manly voice upstairs.

I was expecting Steven but I was faced with a little girl. Sofia ran down the

stairs and giggled when she almost fell. Inayos niya ang palda niya at huminto

sa harapan ko. Wow, she became taller.

“Hello po!” Bati niya sa ‘kin.

“Hi! L-long time no see,” I ruffled her hair.

“Uy! Tumangkad ka, Ate Elyse!” I looked at Steven na kakababa lang ng hagdan.

He was smiling at me so I smiled back. He had grown so much! May suot siyang

specs at may hawak na libro.. tsaka controller. Hindi ko alam kung nag-aaral o

naglalaro sa taas.

“Gutom na ‘ko!” Sofia ran to the dining when she smelled the food.

Huminga ako nang malalim bago naglakad papunta sa dining. I stopped walking

when I saw Sevi’s mom putting plates around the table. Her hair was in a messy

bun and she was wearing an apron. Pakiramdam ko nahugutan ako ng hininga.

“Elyse,” she looked at me and gave me a smile. “Narito ka na pala.”

“Y-yes.. po,” I didn’t know what to say. Sevi held my shaking hand and

squeezed it a bit to give me comfort.

“Upo ka na,” she gave me an assuring smile. “Malapit na maluto ‘yung pagkain.

Saglit lang.”

I nervously sat beside Sevi and stared at his mom, watching her actions. She

looked so.. happy and free. I bit my lower lip and tried to stop the guilt

from spreading inside me. I actually felt proud of her. It wasn’t easy to move

on and let go of what happened but she did.. What a nice heart she had.

“Hindi mo kasalanan,” Sevi whispered, holding my hand again. “Huwag mo nang

isipin ‘yun.”

I gave him a small smile. Wala pa nga ‘kong sinasabi, nababasa na niya ang

iniisip ko. I was about to say something to him when I saw a man enter the

dining room. I didn’t know if I will stand or what to greet him.

“E-engineer Camero,” I called.

“Oh?” Sevi and his dad answered.

“Ako ata, Sev,” his dad laughed, tapping his son on the shoulder. “Hello.

Elyse, ‘di ba? Nauto ka nito?” He pointed at his son.

“Uhm, yes,” I nodded. “I mean, yes I’m Elyse!”

“Kinakabahan ka ata,” his dad laughed. He was wearing a simple pair of maong

pants and white shirt. He looked like he just came from a site. “Shit, ang

ganda ng singsing, ah. Eto ba ‘yun? Eto ‘yung pinili ko, ‘di ba?” He looked at

my hand.

“Pa,” Sevi massaged the bridge of his nose. “Umupo ka na lang.”

“Proud ako! Ako pumili niyan!” His dad laughed before taking his seat. “Galing

ko pumili, ‘no?! Paano siya nag-propose? Ginawa niya ba ‘yung sinabi ko na sa

sinehan tapos pagkatapos ng movie-”

“Uhm, he proposed in the living room. He just gave me the box and asked if I

wanted to change my surname,” I smiled awkwardly.

“Sige, pwede na ‘yon. May TV naman siguro. Kunwari na lang sinehan. Privacy

nga naman, ‘no?” His dad nodded. “Pero maganda talaga ‘yung-”

“Corny kaya,” reklamo ni Sevi.

“Hoy, anong corny?! Ganoon siya nag-propose sa ‘kin!” Sevi’s mom pouted after

putting the bowl of food at the center of the table.

“Kaya nga corny, e,” Sevi scratched his head a little.

I laughed at their stories. I felt a little jealous because of the bond that

they had but they made me feel like I was a part of their family and it was

enough for me. I almost cried when his mom gave me a hug before we left.

“It’s okay,” she whispered on my ear. She said that without context but I

still understood what she meant.

“I’m so sorry,” I bit my lower lip.

“Shush!” She smiled at me. “Welcome ka sa ‘min kahit anong mangyari. Maraming

salamat sa lahat, Elyse, at pati sa Kuya mo.”

“I’m glad you’re happy,” I gave her a painful smile. “I feel better now.”

That afternoon, Sevi and I went to visit my mom. He gave her flowers and lit

up a candle for her. I was just standing there, staring at her name.

Adriana Erin S. Ledezma.

“Hi Mommy,” I sat on the grass, touching her name on the gravestone. “I came

back, and guess what? I’m getting married.”

Sevi sat on the grass beside me, looking away but I knew he was still

listening to me.

“Don’t worry, you already met him and you told me that you liked his

personality and that you knew this man would treat me right,” I chuckled. “I

am marrying the person I love the most, Mommy.. I know that you are happy for

me.”

Sevi looked at me, pursing his lips. I refused to look at him. I just bit my

lower lip to stop myself from tearing up.

“I love him and he loves me so much. I know that and you probably know that,

too. You forgive him, right, Mommy? I just hope he will also forgive himself.

He’s so kind, Mommy. He has the warmest heart ever,” I smiled.

“Eli,” Sev called when I started crying.

“Do you want to hear my wedding vow, Mommy? I wrote it down last night,” I

reached for the folded paper inside my bag.

Sevi stared at me with wide eyes. I started opening the paper, wiping my tears

so I could say them out loud.

“Sevi,” I started. “Today, I give myself to you in marriage. I am about to

promise a lot of things to you so listen carefully so you won’t get lost.”

“Elyse..” His voice was shaking.

“I can’t believe we met because of Arkin’s bad stomach,” I chuckled, reading

the letter. “I can’t believe I hated you the moment I saw you. You just had

that ‘vibe’ that I did not like.. but ended up falling so hard because of it.

Remember when I wore a tiger shirt for the first time? A cheerleader from La

Salle, wearing a tiger shirt in a basketball game. It was the most embarrassing thing I ever did. It took me a lot of games, trainings, exchanges of shirts and other things to realize my real feelings for you. We just couldn't get enough of each other."

Sevi chuckled, playing with the grass and refusing to look at me because I knew he was already tearing up.

"Sevi, my best captain, my King Tiger, my engineer, I love you so much," I stopped to wipe my tears away. "I promise to be with you in every win and every loss. I promise to be with you during the worst times and the best times. I promise to give the best version of myself to you and I promise to help you grow so we could be the best for each other."

I inhaled a large amount of air to calm myself and stifle a sob. Sevi was quiet, but I could see the tears streaming down his face.

"I promise to trust you, respect you, and love you more and more every day. I promise that I will continue cheering on you. I will encourage you and inspire you whatever the circumstances are. I promise to cherish and spend every moment with you, including the bad ones and the good ones. I promise that I will share your sorrows with you, and also your laughs," I started sobbing

that I had to cover my mouth.

“Eli,” Sevi held my hand.

“I promise that I will love you and still choose you when life is hard, when

everything has become so tiring, and when nothing else goes right. I promise

to become your strength, motivation, and inspiration to keep moving forward,”

I closed the paper and tried to wipe my tears again.

“Pinapaiyak mo naman ako, e,” Sevi chuckled, wiping his tears away.

I smiled and held his hand. “I love you, Sev.. and here I am to solemnly and

sincerely declare that I, Amora Elyse Ledezma, accept you, Sebastian Vincent

Camero, as my lawful partner. To have and to hold from this day forward, for

better and for worse, for richer and poorer, in sickness and in health, until

death do us part..”

“I love you, Elyse,” he held my face and gave me a soft kiss.

Â “As I give you my hand to hold, so I give you my life to keep,” I whispered.

“I love you and I will love you for the rest of my life.”

A life with him is full of warmth, hope, and comfort. He is, and forever will

be, my home.

:)

EPILOGUE

“Engineer, balita ko ikaw ang magha-handle ng project sa Ledezma, ah!”

Tinignan ko si Theo na halatang nang-aasar lang. Umirap ako at pinagpatuloy

ang pag-aayos ng gamit ko, hindi nagsasalita. Kakagaling ko lang sa office ni

Mrs. Valeria pero nakarating na kaagad sa kaniya ang balita. Tangina naman,

oh.

“Paano kapag nakita mo si baby mo?” Malakas siyang tumawa kaya kinuha ko ang

blueprint at hinampas sa ulo niya. “Uy, pikon!”

“Pare, huwag mo na kasing asarin,” umiling si Engineer Castillo na nakangisi

rin sa ‘kin. “Asarin sa ex niyang mahal na mahal pa rin niya hanggang ngayon!

Yieee!”

“Bobo,” nilagay ko na lahat ng gamit ko sa bag. “Wala sa Pilipinas ‘yun, ‘di

ba? Hindi kami magkikita n’on.”

“Ah, sure ka, Engineer Camero? Sure ka hindi mo pinagdadasal gabi-gabi na sana

magkita kayo ulit?” Tumawa na naman si Theo.

“Ikaw? Hindi mo ba pinagdadasal gabi-gabi na sana pag-gising mo may trabaho ka

pa rin?” Masama ko siyang tinignan.

“Pikon naman!” Ngumisi siya.

Akala ko talaga hindi na kami magkikita ulit dahil ang balita ko, iba ang

nagha-handle ng kumpanya nila ngayon at noong tinanong ko sa Kuya niya kung

nasaan si Elyse, noong tinutulungan niya pa lang kami sa kaso, ang sabi niya

sa ‘kin umalis daw ng bansa. Hindi niya sinabi sa ‘kin kung saan.

Mas mabuti nga ‘yon dahil baka sundan ko siya roon. Dahil doon, napigilan ko

ang sarili ko at inabala na lang ang sarili sa trabaho. Tanggap ng projects

hanggang sa mag-resign ‘yung dati naming head at ako ang pumalit. Ang saya

saya ko noon pero naroon pa rin ‘yung pakiramdam na parang may kulang.

“I’ll celebrate every milestone with you,” sarkastikong bulong ko sa sarili

ko. “Wala ka nga rito, e.”

Sabi niya ice-celebrate niya mga importanteng event sa buhay ko pero nasaan

siya ngayon? Medyo sakim nga talaga pakinggan pero ang pinapangarap ko lang

noong panahon na ‘yon ay sana umuwi siya. Kahit hindi na siya bumalik sa ‘kin,

basta makita ko lang siya kahit ilang segundo lang, okay na.

Kaso noong nandiyan na, umatras ako bigla.

“Ikaw na um-attend ng meeting sa Ledezma. May meeting kami nila Architect

Valeria,” sabi ko kay Theo, hindi na makatingin sa kaniya.

“Totoo ba ‘yan o ayaw mo lang talaga um-attend?” Kumunot ang noo niya.

“Totoo nga. Tanungin mo pa si Luna,” masama ko siyang tinignan. “O kaya si

Kierra tanungin mo tutal friends naman kayo, e. Friends. Friends lang,” ulit

ko, nakangisi na sa kaniya.

“Engineer Camero, haha!” Sarkastiko siyang tumawa. “Magpasalamat ka talaga’t

boss kita! Nagagawa ko pang kumalma!”

Umalis na siya kaagad para um-attend sa meeting sa Ledezma Group habang ako,

umakyat na sa board room para sa meeting. Hindi naman ako nagsisinungaling.

Totoo namang nagpatawag sila bigla ng meeting pero pabor na rin sa ‘kin ‘yon

dahil balita ko umuwi na siya. Shit, umuwi na siya! Parang noong isang taon,

pinagdadasal ko lang ‘yon tapos ngayon umuwi na pala siya talaga! Lakas ko ata

kay Lord!

“Anong iniisip mo diyan?” Bulong ni Kierra.

“Mama mo,” pambabara ko.

“Mature,” bulong niya at umirap.

Akala ko makakatakas na ‘ko pero bigla na lang akong nakatanggap ng

napakaraming tawag at texts mula sa mga empleyado naming pinadala roon sa

meeting. Pasimple kong tinignan ang phone ko habang nagdi-discuss si Luna sa

harapan. Ang daming text at tawag, anak ng!

‘Engineer Camero, kailangan ka raw po rito sabi ni Miss Ledezma.’

‘Engineer Camero, galit na ho si Miss Ledezma. Nauna raw po ang schedule ng

meeting na ‘to kaya dapat ito raw ang priority mo.’

‘Engineer Camero, mawawalan po tayo ng project kapag hindi ka um-attend dito.

ASAP!’

‘Engineer Camero, hanap ka ng bebe mo miss ka na raw niya pakiss’

Napakunot ang noo ko nang basahin ang huling message galing kay Theo.

Napamasahe ako sa sentido ko at inignore lahat ng tawag sa ‘kin. Nag-type na

lang ako ng reply. Talagang ginawan ko pa sila ng tanginang group chat para

isa na lang ang reply ko.

‘Male-late ako mga 40 minutes, kasama na traffic. Start the meeting without me’. ‘Yun ang sinabi ko. Sana lang ‘yun talaga ang makarating sa kaniya. Siraulo pa naman minsan ang iba sa empleyado namin.

“Hindi pa ba tapos ‘yan? Kailangan ko na umalis, e,” bulong ko kay Kierra.

“May sinasabi ka, Engineer Camero?” Tinaasan ako ng kilay ni Luna.

“Napakaganda mo,” ngumiti ako sa kaniya. “Pwede ba ‘kong umalis? May schedule ako.”

“Nambola ka pa talaga. E’di umalis ka!” Nagalit na nga pero kinuha ko pa rin ang mga gamit ko at nagpaalam sa kanila para makaalis na.

Nagmamadali pa ‘ko papunta. Dala-dala ko pa sasakyan ko pero sana nilakad ko na lang dahil traffic pala talaga. Mas mabilis pa ata kung maglalakad ako, e.

Badtrip naman, oh. Hindi naman sa excited akong makita siya pero baka lang i-pahiya niya ‘ko sa lahat sa sobrang galit niya.

Hinanda ko na sarili ko sa kung ano ang makikita ko. Alam kong posible na marami nang nag-bago sa kaniya dahil ganoon din sa ‘kin. Tama nga ako.

“You’re late, Engineer Camero,” bungad niya sa ‘kin.

Wow, ah. Nagmadali na nga ako, nanginginig pa. Tumakas na nga rin ako sa

meeting namin dahil sa ‘yo tapos mukha pa siyang naiinis sa ‘kin? May trabaho

rin ako, oy! Hindi lang ito!

“My apologies, Miss Ledezma,” sarkastikong sabi ko bago umupo.

Hindi ko siya magawang tignan. Naninibago ako sa kaniya. Anong nangyari sa

buhok niya? Maganda naman tignan sa kaniya pero hindi lang ako sanay. Ang

daming nagbago sa kaniya pati sa itsura niya. Nag-mature na nga siya.

“How long would the construction take? In estimation?”

“3 years, hopefully,” sagot ko. Â “It was already discussed last meeting.”

Hindi ko alam kung paano ko siya kakausapin. Nakita ko pa ‘yung mukha noong

lalaking trip siya noon. Ano? Sila na ba ngayon? Humigpit ang hawak ko sa

folder na hawak ko. Nakatitig lang ako roon habang nag-iisip.

“My apologies, then, Engineer Camero. You might have not noticed that I was

not around last meeting,” sarkastikong sabi niya.

Huwag kang mag-alala, wala naman ako sa meeting na ‘yon pero alam ko pa rin

kung ano ang diniscuss. Hindi na lang ako nag-salita at umiwas ng tingin.

Akala ko ‘yun na ang huling pagkikita namin pero lintik na ‘yan! Bakit ba

patawag siya nang patawag ng meeting? At bakit ba sa sobrang excited ko, ang

aga ko dumating?!

“Madam, lunch mo po,” rinig kong sabi ng secretary niya. Fruit cup at pasta?

‘Yun lang ang kakainin niya?

Ano bang pakialam ko? Bakit ba nangingialam ako?

“No, I’m good. I’m full,” sagot ni Elyse. “Let’s have a break, everyone. Eat

your snacks.”

Tumayo na lang ako at kumuha ng tubig para maiwas ang tingin sa kaniya. Akala

ko lang pala makakaiwas ako. Nagulat ako nang bigla siyang tumayo para kumuha

rin ng tubig. Hindi ko pa nakakalahati ‘yung container ko, tinigil ko na at

pinauna siyang kumuha.

“Thanks,” ngumiti siya sa ‘kin pero ‘yung ngiti niya para siyang natatae o

ano. Anong itsura ‘yon?

Amoy na amoy ko ‘yung pabango niya. Ano? Jo Malone pa rin ba pabango nito o

iba na? Chanel, ganoon? Umiwas ako ng tingin at bahagyang napakamot sa ilong

ko. Nababahing ako bigla. Bakit ba amoy na amoy ko pabango niya? Ang lapit

niya sa ‘kin pero wala na ‘kong maaatrasan dahil dingding na ‘yung katabi ng

water dispenser. Naiipit ako sa gilid.

“Madam, hindi ka po kakain ng lunch? Liligpitin ko na po ba?”

Napakunot ang noo ko at tumingin sa kaniya. Hindi ba talaga siya kakain?

Kumakain pa ba ‘tong si Elyse? Oo pumayat siya at mas nagmukha siyang fit pero

bakit ayaw niyang kumain ngayon? Pero ang pinakamahalaga.. Bakit may malamig

sa sapatos ko?

“Shit!” Hinawakan ko kaagad ang kamay niya para alisin sa water dispenser.

Binitawan ko kaagad siya nang maramdaman sa kamay ko ang singsing na suot

niya. Napatingin ako roon saglit pero mas nag-alala ako sa sapatos ko.

“Sorry!” Nag-panic siya at muntik pang madulas. Mabuti na lang nahawakan ko

ang bewang niya. Nag-mukha lang kaming nasa teleserye. Buti na lang hindi nag-

slow mo. Anak ng pating.

Noong groundbreaking, abala ako sa pag-babasa ng speech ko para mamaya. Nasa

tabing-dagat ako at naglalakad-lakad. Napahinto ako nang makita ko si Elyse na

nakatayo rin at pinapanood ang alon sa dagat. Matagal akong nakatitig sa

kaniya mula sa malayo, kinakabisado ‘yung itsura niya kung sakaling hindi na

kami magkikita ulit.

“Layo mo,” bulong ko bago umiling at naglakad na ulit paalis para practice-in

ang speech ko.

Ginabi na kami roon nila Bianca kaka-discuss ng mangyayari sa site sa susunod

na araw. Napatingin ako kay Elyse na akala mo nangangandidato. Lahat ng staff

binabati bago umalis.

“Matunaw ‘yan,” sabi ni Mark. Si Engineer Castillo.

“Tanga, hindi ako nakatingin sa kaniya,” umiwas ako ng tingin at nakinig na

lang sa sinasabi ni Architect Rosario.

Napasulyap ulit ako kay Elyse nang mapansing uuwi na siya. Sinundan ko siya ng

tingin hanggang sa mawala siya sa paningin ko. Kinuha ko ang cellphone ko at

tinignan ang oras. Gabi na. Kailangan na rin namin umuwi.

“Okay na ‘yan. Bukas na lang ulit,” sabi ko.

“Nagmamadali ka ba, Engineer?” Tanong ni Bianca.

“Gabi na, e. Babalik pa tayo sa Manila,” pinakita ko sa kanila ang relo ko.

“Baka hindi na rin tayo magkaintindihan dito. Madilim na.”

“Ang daming palusot. Umalis ka na lang, oy,” bulong ni Theo, tumatawa pa.

Mabuti na lang at nag-wrap up na rin sila sa pinag-uusapan kaya nakaalis na

‘ko. Sumakay ako sa Macan ko at nag-drive paalis. Natawa ako saglit nang

makita ko ang sasakyan niyang nakahinto sa gilid. Bumagal ang pagmamaneho ko

para panoorin kung paano niya sipain ‘yung maliliit na bato sa gilid niya.

Mukha siyang inapi. Kawawa naman kaya pinasunod ko na lang sa ‘kin.

Normal lang naman sa ‘kin na mabilis akong magpatakbo. Hindi ko naman talaga

siya inaasar pero napahinto ako nang marinig ko ang busina sa likod.

“Ay gago amputa,” bulong ko nang makitang muntik na siyang mabunggo. Binagalan

ko tuloy ang pagmamaneho ko.

At naiihi pa nga! Napakagaling!

“I mean, I was trying to catch up! Nawawala ako because you were driving so

fast like you were in some kind of a racing movie or something. Y-you probably

think that you’re Lightning McQueen or-”

“Lightning McQueen,” ulit ko, nakatitig sa kaniya.

“Yeah, you know that movie? The one who says kachow?”

Ano raw? Bakit nakakatawa pakinggan kapag siya ang nagsasabi?

“The one who says what?” Tinaas ko ang kilay ko, pinipigilan ang ngiti.

“K-kachow?”

Ang cute, amp.

Hiniram niya pa powerbank ko pero nakalimutan ko na naman kuhanin sa kaniya.

Pwede namang ibalik niya na lang sa ‘kin sa susunod na meeting kung mayroon

man pero hindi ko inaasahang pupunta talaga siya ng Batangas para lang i-balik

sa ‘kin ‘yon. ‘Yung gas! Mahal ang gas, ‘no!

At namigay pa nga ng calling card na parang namimigay ng candy. Bakit sa

kanila binibigay niya number niya? Hindi ba dapat sa ‘kin? Ako lang naman ang

kailangan niyang contact-in kung may gusto siya malaman sa site? Dapat ako,

‘di ba?! Ako!

“Is that your food?” Turo niya sa lunch box.

“Hindi, binigay lang ni Engineer Ramos,” tumingin ako roon. Hindi ko pa ‘yun

kinakain dahil may sarili naman akong dala at kinain ko na kanina. Hindi ko

talaga maintindihan kung bakit bigay nang bigay ng pagkain si Bianca kahit

alam niyang binibigay ko lang din naman kay Theo.

“You haven’t eaten yet?” Tanong niya.

Kumunot ang noo ko, iniisip kung sasabihin ko ba ‘yung totoo o hindi.

“Hindi pa,” pagsisinungaling ko.

“Okay,” tumango siya at ngumiti sa ‘kin. “You guys should eat. Uhm.. I should

go now.”

Ano? ‘Yun na ‘yon? Akala ko pa naman aayain niya ‘ko kumain! Scam pala ‘to, e!

Nagbago ka na talaga, Elyse!

Napakatahimik na ng buhay ko sa condo, e. Binago ko ‘yung interior. Bumili ako

ng bagong mga gamit at pinalitan pa ang pintura, pati ‘yung kisame inayos ko

para lang maalis ‘yung alaala sa kaniya pero hindi ko pa rin talaga gustong

kalimutan siya. Hinanap ko pa talaga ‘yung painting na tinuro niya rati para

ilagay sa kwarto namin.

Namin.. pero mag-isa na lang ako ngayon. Sabi ko gusto ko makalimot pero may

parte sa ‘kin na rito pa rin nakatira dahil gusto kong inaalala siya kahit

masakit. May kasamang saya naman ‘yun, e. Limang taon din kami. Napakahirap

niyang kalimutan. Siya na ‘yung naging tahanan ko, e. Siya na ‘yung babaeng

alam kong gusto kong pakasalan tapos bigla na lang.. Nawala. Lahat.

Hindi ko alam kung paano ako nakaahon, o baka hanggang ngayon lunod na lunod

pa rin talaga ako sa pagmamahal ko sa kaniya.

“You’re so annoying! I want to sleep!” Sigaw niya sa ‘kin.

“Mas nakakainis ka. Ako rin gusto ko na matulog,” inis na sabi ko pabalik.

Nakakainis kasi kahit ayaw ko na, hindi ko pa rin mapigilan ang sarili kong

alagaan siya. Hindi ko siya kayang hayaang nakahiga sa sahig o sa sofa tapos

lasing pa. May something lang talaga sa kaniya na hindi ko kayang tiisin.

From: Elyse Ledezma

Can I stay here for the meantime

To: Elyse Ledezma

Okay. Huwag kang mag alala, hindi ako uuwi.

Mahigpit akong napahawak sa cellphone ko pagka-send. Napahilamos ako sa mukha

ko gamit ang kamay ko at bumuntong-hininga. Gusto kong umuwi. Gustong gusto

kong umuwi pero baka hindi siya komportable na naroon ako kaya rito na lang

muna ako sa Batangas.

“Hindi ka pa kakain?” Tumaas ang kilay ko.

“Why? You want my meal? Takaw mo naman! Bakit hindi ‘yun ‘yung kainin mo?”

Tinuro niya na naman ‘yung bigay ni Bianca

“Bakit galit ka?” Nagtatakang tanong ko. “Busog nga ako.”

Hindi ako busog. Ayoko lang talagang kainin sa harapan niya dahil mukhang

kinamumuhian niya ‘yung lunch box na ‘yon. Ano bang ginawa n’on sa kaniya?

“Masarap ba siya magluto?” Tanong niya. Hindi ko alam kung bakit mahalaga pa

‘yon! Siyempre hindi ko maitatanggi na masarap magluto si Bianca pero hindi ko

na lang din sinagot.

“Bakit mo tinatanong? Ikaw ata ang may gusto,” kinuha ko ang paper bag. “Oh,

sayo na.”

“Ew, hell no!”

Ano ba? Bakit ba galit siya? Baka isipin kong mahal niya pa ‘ko at nagseselos

siya, e. Ang hirap niya rin talaga basahin minsan lalo na ngayon na nagbago na

naman ugali niya.

“Pabalik na ‘kong Manila,” sabi ko pagkatapos kuhanin ang mga gamit ko.

“Okay,” tumango siya.

Kumunot ang noo ko at tumingin sa kaniya. Ano? Ganoon na lang ‘yon? Mas gusto

ba niyang sumabay doon sa kumag niyang empleyado? Siyempre, hindi ako payag.

“Hindi ka sasabay?” Tumaas ang kilay ko.

Pagdating namin sa condo, kumuha na kaagad ako ng mga damit ko sa walk-in

closet para bumalik sa Batangas. Pagkatapos, kinuha ko na ang bag ko at

binuksan ang pinto ng bedroom para magpaalam sa kaniya.

“Alis na ‘ko,” paalam ko.

“Take care,” nanghihinang sabi niya, balot na balot pa ng comforter.

Sinara ko ang pinto at huminga nang malalim.

“Tangina naman,” bulong ko bago pumasok ng walk-in closet para ibalik lahat ng

damit na kinuha ko.

Nagpalit kaagad ako ng jacket at bumaba para mag-grocery. Wala akong masyadong

stock ng pagkain pero kailangan ko siyang lutuan ng soup o kung ano man kaya

bumili pa ‘ko bago umakyat ulit. Nag-luto ako habang natutulog siya. Nang

buksan ko ang kwarto, tulog pa rin siya. Lumapit ako at umupo sa tabi niya

para tignan ang mukha niya.

Nilagay ko ang kamay ko sa noo niya at napabuntong-hininga nang maramdaman ang

init doon. Tumayo ulit ako at nag-hanap ng gamot pero wala rin akong stock

kaya kailangan ko pang lumabas kahit umuulan. Ni hindi na ‘ko nakapagdala ng

payong kaya tinakbo ko na lang.

Pagkabalik ko, gising na siya. Gulat na gulat siya nang makita ako.

“I thought you.. left,” napakurap siya.

Akala ko rin, pero hindi ko pala siya kayang iwan lalo na kung ganito. Hindi

na ‘ko nakatulog buong gabi kakaalaga sa kaniya. Umalis ako ng kwarto noong

matutulog na siya pero bumalik din ako para bantayan siya. Umupo ako sa couch

at pinanood siya. Pinikit ko ang mga mata ko at tinakip ang braso sa mukha,

sinusubukang matulog. Nagising din ako kaagad. Siguro dalawang oras lang ang

tinulog ko.

“You’re off to work?” Tanong niya sa ‘kin.

Kung ayaw niya, sabihin niya lang. Maga-absent ako sa trabaho para alagaan

siya. Willing naman ako, e pero hindi ‘yun ang sinabi niya.

Noong lunch sa office, para akong tangang nag-hahanda ng lunch box sa table

ko. Tumatawa pa si Theo at si Mark habang kumakain. Nakiki-kain pa sa opisina

ko ang mga kupal. Nilagay ko na sa paper bag ang pagkain para dalhin doon nang

biglang pumasok si Engineer Guzman, dala-dala ang hard hat.

“Sir! Aalis na ho ako, Sir!” Bibong sabi niya sa ‘kin.

“Saan punta mo?” Kumunot ang noo ko.

“May inaayos po kaming unit diyan, Sir!” Ngumiti siya sa ‘kin.

“O, diba roon ka rin nakatira?” Sabi ni Theo sa ‘kin. “Ayan, o. Padala mo na

diyan kay Engineer Guzman. Tipid sa gas tsaka mabilis lang. Naka-motor ka, ‘di

ba, boy?”

“Anong ipapadala, Engineer Camero?! Akin na! Libre transpo at gas! I

volunteer!” Tuwang tuwa siyang lumapit.

“Oh. Itetext ko sa ‘yo ‘yung unit tsaka ‘yung sasabihin mo sa kaniya,” inabot

ko ang paper bag.

“Sige po, Engineer! Sino po ba ang tatanggap nito sa condo n’yo?”

“Huwag ka nang chismoso,” umiling ako at umupo na sa swivel chair ko. “Sige

na. Baka ma-late ka pa.”

“Jowa niya ‘yon!” Sigaw ni Mark bago pa makaalis si Engineer Guzman.

Bagong salta lang ‘yun, e. Napakarami niyang energy. Sana all. Naalala ko

tuloy ‘yung sarili ko noon. Tamang pa-good shot lang din ako, e.. kaso laki ng

galit sa ‘kin noong matandang ‘yon. Baka naiinggit sa itsura ko.

Pagkatapos kumain, bumalik na rin kami sa site. Abalang abala ako habang

pinapanood ‘yung mga tauhan namin mag-buhat ng materyales. Napahawak ako sa

bewang ko, nakasuot ng hard hat at nakatakip nang kaunti sa mata dahil sa

init.

“Oy, ano ‘yan? Hindi diyan! Sabi ko dalhin n’yo sa likod,” turo ko.

“Ah, sorry, Engineer!” Lumiko kaagad sila.

Kinuha ko ang cellphone ko nang maramdamang may nag-text sa ‘kin. Binuksan ko

kaagad ang message ni Elyse at nakita ang mukha niya roon, punong puno ‘yung

pisngi ng pagkain. Napangiti ako sa sarili ko habang nakatitig.

“Engineer, saan po ulit?” May nanggulo pa sa ‘kin.

“Doon!” Turo ko at bumalik na lang sa office.

Sinave ko ang picture at ‘yun ang ginawa kong profile niya sa contacts ko.

Pinalitan ko na rin ‘yung pangalan. Sana lang hindi niya makita.

To: Ex

Galing ng hamster.

Nanatili ako sa Batangas dahil nasasayangan ako sa gas kung magpapabalik-balik

ako. Hiniwalay ko nga ang sarili ko kila Theo pero punta naman sila nang punta

sa hotel room ko, may dala-dala pang alak. Ang iingay.

“O, bakit nakatitig ka sa cellphone mo, Master? May hinihintay ka atang text?”

Pang-aasar ni Theo.

“Saan ka galing? Bakit ngayon ka lang?” Tanong ko kay Mark. “Wala ka kanina,

ah.”

“Sinuportahan ko kaibigan ko, Master. Nag-bukas ng restaurant, e. Nakita ko

nga ‘yung ex mo, e. May kasamang lalaki pero mukhang friends lang naman sila,”

pagkekwento niya sa ‘kin.

“Friends,” ulit ko sabay inom. Ang higpit ng hawak ko sa baso. Pakiramdam ko

mababasag ko ‘yon gamit ‘yung kamay ko.

Ang init tuloy ng ulo ko kinabukasan. Nakakabadtrip. Hindi na ‘ko nakatulog

kakaisip kung bakit sila magkasama at bakit sila nagdi-dinner? Bakit sila lang

dalawa? May namamagitan na ba sa kanila? Tama ba ang hinala kong pinatulan

niya na ‘yon?

Napakunot ang noo ko nang makita ko si Engineer Lavin na kausap si Elyse.

Bakit narito siya? At bakit mukhang tanga si Theo? Halatang walang sinasabing

matino, e. Umiwas na lang ako ng tingin at binalik ang atensyon ko sa kausap

kong worker.

May sinagot lang akong tawag, pagkabalik ko wala na siya. Napamasahe ako sa

ilong ko bago ako bumaba at nag ikot-ikot para hanapin siya. Napahinto ako

nang makitang may nagkukumpulan at nagkakagulo roon.

“Tapos na ba kayo sa ginagawa n’yo?” Inis na tanong ko.

Nagsi-balikan kaagad sila sa trabaho.

“Nainuman ko na ‘yan,” sabi ko nang makitang iinuman niya ang water container

ko.

“Uh,” umiwas siya ng tingin. “Sorry. Are you LC?”

Matagal akong napatitig sa kaniya at natawa. Ako pa ngayon ang laway

conscious, ah? Siya nga ‘yung nagsabi n’on dati. Proud na proud pa siya.

“Ikaw ‘yung LC, diba?” Tanong ko

“Well,” hindi siya makapagsalita.

Siyempre, hindi na. Nahalikan na kita. Natikman mo na ‘ko. LC ka pa rin ba sa

‘kin pagkatapos ng lahat ng ginawa natin?

“Sige na, uminom ka na,” sabi ko na lang, pinipigilan ang ngisi ko.

Kung minamalas ka nga naman, o. Lahat ng kamalasan sa mundo, nakuha na ni

Elyse. Nadapa na nga, natagusan pa. Hindi naman malaking kaso sa ‘kin ‘yon

dahil sa limang taon na magkasama kami, komportable na kami sa isa’t isa. May

isang beses ngang ako pa ang naglaba ng bed sheet dahil natagusan siya.

“May malapit bang tindahan dito?” Tanong ko kay Theo.

“Bakit? Anong bibilhin mo? Doon yata mayroon,” turo niya sa kabilang side ng

kalsada.

“Napkin,” sabi ko bago umalis.

“Ay, mayroon ka na?!” Pahabol niya pa. “Congratulations, Engineer!”

Sabi ko hindi ako uuwi noong gabing ‘yon pero hindi ako mapakali. Kinuha ko

ang mga gamit ko at kahit gabi na, nag-drive ako pabalik ng Manila. Sakto pang

kakasakay ko lang ng elevator nang mag-story siya na malungkot siya.

Napapansin ko lahat sa kaniya. Malungkot ang mga mata niya at hindi siya

gaanong kumakain kaya lahat ginagawa ko para pilitin siya. Hindi na healthy

para sa kaniya ‘yon kahit sabihin niyang diet niya ‘yon.

Ang daming kapalpakan ni Elyse pero tinatanggap ko na lang lahat dahil ayaw ko

siyang umalis. Hindi ko rin siya kayang paalisin. Kawawa na ‘yung uniform ko.

Sabi pa naman ni Mrs. Valeria, ‘yun ang suotin sa meeting bukas dahil may

picture-taking. E ‘di ang ganda noon! Ako lang ang naiiba ‘yung kulay! Lintik

na ‘yan.

Kahit anong tago ko, nahalata na rin nila Theo na nakatira na si Elyse sa

condo. Ang sabi ko rati, ilang araw lang siya roon dahil wala siyang mauwian

pero ‘tong mga gagong ‘to, sinubukan pang siguraduhin! Bumisita pa nga!

“Kanino ‘yon, Engineer Camero?” Tanong ni Bianca.

“Sa asawa ko.”

Shit! Tangina!

Hindi ko alam ang sasabihin ko! ‘Yun na ‘yung unang lumabas sa bibig ko at

mukha naman akong gago kung bigla kong sasabihin na joke lang. Wala na ‘kong

naisip.

“Are you jealous?” Tanong niya bigla sa ‘kin pagkatapos ko siyang sunduin doon

sa birthday ‘celebration’ ng kupal na Austin.

“Ako?” Natawa ako nang sarkastiko.

“Why? Are you seeing someone else here?”

“Bakit ako magseselos doon? Ang pangit pangit noon,” napairap ako.

Hindi naman talaga siya pangit at hindi ko sinasadyang insultuhin siya pero

pinangungunahan lang talaga ako ng selos. Hindi naman sa threatened ako pero..

Naiirita ako, puta! Nakakabadtrip talaga! Siyempre hindi ko masabi!

elydezma: Sweet escape. Who wants to drink wine with me? Vieni qui e baciami.

Sinearch ko kaagad kung anong meaning n’on. Come here and kiss me, amp? Para

kanino na naman ‘yon? Para roon sa Austin?

“Ay, puta, na-like,” bulong ko.

Binawi ko kaagad ang like ko. Hindi ‘yun kalike-like kung hindi para sa ‘kin

‘yung caption. Tinuon ko na lang ang atensyon sa pagluluto para sabihin sa

kaniyang umuwi ako rito sa condo tapos madadatnan kong wala siya rito? Nasa

Cebu bigla?

“Pare, ayoko talaga uminom,” sabi ko kay Arkin habang nilalagyan niya ng Black

Label ‘yung baso ko.

“Minsan na nga lang tayo magkasama, e,” nagtatampong sabi niya pa. “Tsaka

narito ka na, oh?! Just drink it, pare.”

“Ayokong uminom.. ng Black Label,” pag-correct ko sa sinabi ko.

Ang hirap hagilapin nitong si Arkin, e. Napaka in-demand ng gago. Palipat-

lipat pa ng bansa. Sikat na sikat na ‘to, ah. Ngayon lang siya available kaya

nag-aya uminom. Sinama ko na rin si Theo.

“Brokenhearted ka ata, Master,” pang-aasar ni Theo. “Huwag kang mag-alala!

Mahal ka n’on! Inom mo na lang ‘yan!”

“Hindi ako mahal n’on!” Sumimangot ako. “Mas gusto niya ‘yung Austin na ‘yon!

Chance?! Bibigyan niya ng chance?! Hah!”

“Sino ba ‘yon? Abangan natin sa kanto,” nakisali pa ‘tong si Arkin. “Gusto mo,

pare, retuhan kita? Model?”

“Ulol, kung hindi si Elyse, hindi ako interesado,” napailing ako.

“Sabi ko nga, e,” tumawa si Arkin. “Lakas pa rin ng amats mo roon.”

“Bakit ang balahura mo magsalita kapag kami kausap mo pero kapag nasa TV ka

parang ang pormal mo? Englishero,” nagtatakang tanong ni Theo. “Basta ako, I

don’t English, pare.”

Hindi ko na rin alam kung paano pa ‘ko nakauwi. Hinatid ata ako ni Arkin.

Medyo nahimasmasan na ‘ko sa kakainom ko ng tubig pero medyo nahihilo pa rin

ako. Hindi ko na nga makita si Elyse nang maayos.

Circle ba siya? Circle.. 360 degrees.. Pick-up line ‘yun ng prof ko rati.

Naalala ko lang bigla. Ang ganda ng nasa harapan ko! Ex ko ‘to?! Ex ko ‘to,

p’re! Pinatulan ako nito?! Bakit?!

To: Ex

Nasa condo ka pa? Pakuha nung naiwan kong black folder sa study room. Padala

sa Batangas kung pwede. Kung hindi, kukuhanin ko na lang sa ‘yo.

Gusto ko lang talaga siya makita. Wala naman akong pakialam sa folder na ‘yon,

pero noong kinahapunan, sinubukan ko siyang tawagan bago pumuntang Tagaytay

kaso busy ‘yung phone niya. May kausap ata siya sa tawag kaya dumiretso na

lang ako sa pinapagawang bahay ni Luna.

Bakit ba tinanggap ko gawin ‘yon?! Ang dami ko nang ginagawa, e! Nadadamay na

naman ako sa kanilang dalawa!

“Ooh, sino siya?” Tanong niya sa ‘kin.

“Attorney Kalix Martinez,” tinignan ko siya. Â “‘Yung may-ari ng bahay. Ex ni

Luna. Bakit mo tinatanong?”

Bakit niya tinatanong? Interesado ba siya? Bakit siya interesado at bakit ako

naiinis? Ito ba ‘yung karma ko. Siguro nga. Ang lakas pa ng loob ko noon pag-

selosin si Kalix noong may meeting kami tapos babalik lang din pala sa ‘kin.

Ganito pala ang feeling. Hindi ko na nga gagawin ‘yon! Delikado na rin ang

buhay ko! Ang dami nang galit sa ‘kin.

Pinauna ko na si Eli para makabili ako ng cake. Nakabili na ‘ko noong isang

araw ng singsing kasama ‘yung tatay ko.

“Sino ba ‘yan? Sigurado ka na ba diyan?” Tanong ni Papa habang pumipili kami

ng singsing.

“Ako, sigurado na sa kaniya. Siya, hindi ko alam,” bumuntong-hininga ako.

“E’di huwag mo munang i-bigay hangga’t hindi pa sigurado. Baka naman ma-

pressure ‘yung tao. Uy, eto! Maganda ‘to, o,” turo niya sa may salamin.

Kinuha ng babae ‘yung singsing at pinakita sa ‘kin.

“Pota, ang mahal,” bulong ng tatay ko. “Huwag na ‘yan!”

“Okay na ‘yan,” inabot ko ang card ko. “Maganda naman, e. Maganda rin ‘yung

magsusuot.”

“Huwag ka pa-kampante, boy,” ngumisi si Papa.

Tama siya. Hindi nga dapat ako nagpa-kampante dahil iniwan ako ni Elyse sa

mismong birthday niya. Napakasakit dahil hindi ko alam kung ano ‘yung dahilan

ngayon. Bakit ba umalis na naman siya?

‘Sev,

Thanks for making me stay here for a short period of time.

You can have your freedom back now.’

Tinanggap ko ‘yung rason niya kung bakit kinailangan niyang umalis noon pero

‘yung ngayon, hindi ko talaga maintindihan. Kinuha niya ang mga gamit niya.

Hindi ko na alam kung paano uuwi ulit doon nang hindi umaasang uuwi siya kaya

nanatili na lang ako sa Batangas.

“Limang taon ‘yun, Elyse,” umiyak ako. “Halos lahat ng gawin ko, naaalala

kita. Pag gising, pag-kain, pag-inom, pag-alis, pag-uwi, lahat..”

Lahat. Lahat ng gagawin ko sa araw-araw, siya ang naaalala ko. Bakit kailangan

niya ‘kong sanayin ulit? Noong akala ko nakaahon na ‘ko sa kaniya, tinulak

niya ulit ako pababa, tapos bigla niyang bibitawan ‘yung kamay ko. Nalunod na

naman ako. Parang ganoon ang naramdaman ko.

Napakahirap mahiwalay sa taong napakatagal mong kasama. Nakakapagod mag-

entertain ng iba kaya wala talaga akong naging girlfriend kundi siya. Sa ilang

taong wala siya, wala akong ginawa kung hindi subukan umahon at kompletuhin

ulit ang sarili ko.

Sanay na sanay na ‘ko sa presensya niya na hindi ko alam kung ano o paano ba

‘ko noong hindi pa kami magkakilala. Ang hirap balikan.

“I miss you na, ugh,” humiga siya sa kama. “You know what? I haven’t had sex

for almost 4 years na! Am I dying?!”

Natigilan ako saglit. Ah.. Siya rin pala? Hindi lang ako? Hindi ko alam kung

ano ang dapat kong maramdaman doon.

“I miss your hands on my boobs.”

Pota.

Napalunok ako roon at napatingin sa kaniya, nakakunot ang noo. Ano ba?

Pinagtitripan ba niya ‘ko? Ayaw na ayaw ko siyang hawakan lalo na’t lasing

siya. Tinanggap ko na lang na nagbibiro lang siya.

“I miss you so much,” bulong niya bago makatulog.

Humarap ako sa kaniya at nakitang nakapikit na siya. Inalis ko ang nakaharang

na buhok sa mukha niya at hinaplos ang pisngi niya. Napabuntong-hininga ako,

titig na titig sa kaniya.

“I love you,” bulong ko kahit alam kong hindi niya maririnig. Sana makaabot sa

panaginip niya. Kahit doon lang.

“Get me another one! How dare you throw it out?! You should have just kept it

for two weeks, I guess? What did you do to it?”

“Sinangla ko.”

Siyempre, hindi ko sinangla. Bakit ko isasangla ‘yon?! Tinago ko na lang sa

may ilalim ng lamesa, kung saan hindi niya makikita dahil wala naman siyang

pakialam sa coffee table. Kapag sa study room ko tinago, alam kong

papakialaman niya ‘yon.

Bwisit na Austin ‘yon. Singsing din ang regalo. Papansin amputa! Gaya-gaya!

“Good afternoon, Sir,” bati ko sa Chairman.

“We want to go around the site,” sabi niya.

“Yeah, sure. Engineer Lavin, ‘yung hard hats.”

Marami siyang tinatanong tungkol sa materials at sa construction. Napahinto

kami sa paglalakad para makapagsuot sila ng hard hats. Napasulyap ako sa

pwesto ni Elyse nang makitang sinuotan siya ng hard hat noong Austin na ‘yon.

Ano bang trip niya? May kamay naman si Elyse, ah!

“I guess you were right, Anthony,” tumawa si Mr. Del Rosario. “Mukhang

nagkakamabutihan na nga si Miss Ledezma at si Austin, huh?”

Napatigil kaagad kami sa paglalakad. Napatingin sa ‘kin si Elyse,

nagpapaliwanag ang mata. Nang makita ko ang kamay ni Austin sa balikat niya,

napailing ako at lumingon kay Theo.

“Abangan mo sa labas. Susunod ako,” bulong ko.

Â “Oh, no, it’s not-”

“I’m still courting her, Sir,” tumawa pa si gago. Â “Hopefully, she would say

yes.”

Anong yes?! Gago!

“Wala bang boyfriend si Miss Ledezma?”

Magkakaroon. Ngayon na.

“No, she told me she was single.”

Napataas ang kilay ko. Ah, ‘yun ba ‘yung sinabi niya sa kaibigan niya? Siguro

nga single siya. Ako rin, single.

“Ako sa tatay, ikaw doon sa kaibigan, tapos abangan natin sa labas ‘yung

Austin. G na, master,” bulong sa ‘kin ni Theo.

Tatawa na sana ako pero biglang nag-ring ang phone ko. Tumatawag si Luna.

“Sorry, I’ll just take this call. Engineer Lavin, ikaw na,” paalam ko bago

umalis.

Pumunta kaagad ako sa opisina kahit tinatawag ako ni Elyse. Totoo namang may

pinapahanap na files sa ‘kin si Luna pero sabi ko mamaya ko na lang ise-send.

Pumasok ako sa C.R para maghilamos at maghugas ng kamay bago lumabas ulit sa

opisina. Ginawa ko lahat para mapakalma ang sarili ko.

Sumandal ako sa table nang bumukas ang pinto. Tumaas kaagad ang kilay ko kay

Elyse. Sumunod pa talaga siya rito, ah. Hindi pa naman ako nakakapag-isip nang

maayos kapag nagseselos ako.

“The man I like is you. How about that? Are you aware of that one?”

Napatingin ako sa labi niya at nakipagtalo pa sa sarili ko. Bahala na. Lumapit

ako para mahalikan siya. Halik lang ang plinano ko pero hindi ko na napigilan

ang sarili ko. Nang marinig ang tawag niya sa pangalan ko, parang nawala na

rin ang iniingatan kong pasensya sa sarili ko.

“Masarap?”

“Fuck you,” mariing sabi niya.

Ah, tangina. Hindi ko alam kung bakit mas uminit ang pakiramdam ko nang

murahin niya ‘ko. Hinalikan ko ulit siya at binilisan ang galaw ng daliri ko

sa loob niya. Sa tagal naming magkasama, alam na alam ko na kung ano ang

masarap at hindi sa kaniya. Ako lang may alam n’on. Walang ibang tao. Ako

lang.

“Uhm, Engineer Camero, may itatanong daw si Sir Anthony sa site. Babalik ka pa

ba?” Ngumisi si Theo.

“Oo, babalik na,” tumango ako at naglakad na palabas.

Habang naglalakad kami sa buhanginan, inabutan ako ng tanginang alcohol nitong

si Theo. Tinanggap ko ‘yon at naglagay sa kamay ko habang tumatawa siya.

“Ang dumi dumi mo,” pang-aasar niya sa ‘kin.

“Ulol,” umiling ako.

“Tangina, wala akong narinig pero pagkabukas mo ng pinto, halatang halata

kayo, Master! Napakainit bigla kahit naka-aircon?! Yikes!” Tumatawa pa rin

siya. “Iba ‘yung amoy, amputa.”

“Manahimik ka na lang. Inggitero,” bulong ko.

Hindi naman ako kinakabahan sa mga tanong ng Chairman tsaka ni Mr. Del

Rosario. Kahit noong tinignan nila ‘yung opisina ko, hindi pa rin ako

kinabahan. Ano naman? Nag-sex kami sa loob, bakit? Angal ba sila?

Kaso nasa trabaho nga pala ako kaya mapapahamak pa kaming dalawa.

“Gusto mo palitan ng apelyido ko?” Tanong ko.

Hindi iyon ang proposal na nasa isip ko pero dahil binanggit na rin naman niya

ang tungkol sa apelyido, baka naman pwede kong mai-singit ‘yon. Hindi ko

inaasahang tatanggapin niya pero ginawa niya pa rin.

“I can’t wait to marry you,” bulong niya, umiiyak.

“Ako rin,” hinalikan ko siya sa noo.

Nag-aya si Sam ng club. Ang sabi niya, bawal daw dalhin ang asawa o kaya ang

girlfriend o boyfriend pero isang malaking scam ang nangyari! Sabi kasi ni

Luna, hindi siya pupunta kapag hindi niya pwedeng i-sama si Kalix dahil ayaw

niya raw pumunta mag-isa. Ayon! Ang nangyari, parang nagsama-sama lahat ng may

galit sa ‘kin. *Tangina.*

“Pare, buti umakyat ka na rito,” sabi ko kay Arkin nang makita siya.

“Bakit?” Tumatawang tanong niya. “Uy, musta?” Binati niya sila Kalix.

Nagsama-sama kami ngayon sa couch, nag-uusap tungkol sa kung ano-ano habang

nag-iinuman sila Elyse doon. Hindi ko maalis ang tingin ko sa kaniya. Halatang

sinusubukan niyang maka-keep up kila Yanna, e hindi naman niya kaya ‘yung

alcohol tolerance ng mga ‘yon. Siya ang unang malalasing diyan.

“So you already proposed to her?” Tanong ni Hiro sa ‘kin.

“Oo,” tumango ako.

“Sino mauuna sa inyo?” Tumawa si Arkin at tumingin kay Kalix.

“Matagal pa kami ni Eli. May inaayos pa sa trabaho kaya mauuna si Attorney

Martinez,” sagot ko naman sa kaniya.

“Just call me Kalix, come on,” uminom si Kalix sa baso niya, nakatingin pa rin

kay Luna.

“Attorney!” Napalingon kami bigla kay Adonis na mukhang naligaw lang dito.

“Narito pala kayo! Sabi na nga ba ikaw ang nakita namin mula sa taas, e!”

“What’s up,” bati rin ni Hiro.

Naroon din ang isa nilang kaibigan na si Leo. Maya-maya, may dumating na rin

na isa pa. Tinanguan ko siya at tinapik niya naman ako sa balikat. Mukhang

napalakas, ah! Mukhang may kasamang galit?!

Tama nga ang hinala ko. Lasing na nga si Elyse noong nakarating sila sa dance

floor. Sumandal ako sa railings, may hawak pang baso, para panoorin siya.

Sumandal din sa tabi ko si Kalix at si Hiro. Sila Arkin nagtatawanan lang

doon.

“Your girlfriend’s drunk,” turo ni Kalix.

“Oo nga, e,” napailing ako. “Si Luna rin. Hindi naman uminom pero mukhang

lasing.”

“That’s her normal state,” napailing din si Kalix.

“Captain Juarez, tignan mo asawa mo, oh,” turo ko kay Yanna na nagte-twerk

doon sa gitna. Natawa tuloy ako dahil hinahatak na siya ni Sam.

“Damn,” ngumisi si Hiro at uminom na lang sa baso niya. “That’s hot.”

“Worry about your partner, Engineer Camero,” natawa saglit si Kalix. “Go pick

her up. She looks like she’ll faint in a second.”

“Hindi pa ‘yan,” umiling ako, nakatitig kay Elyse. Sana nga hindi mahimatay

bigla. “Kaya niya pa ‘yan.”

Kinaya nga niya pero pagkauwi, nag-pass out bigla sa kama. Pagkatapos akong

halik-halikan, nakatulog na lang siya bigla. Napailing ako at tinanggal ang

makeup sa mukha niya bago tinanggal ang marumi niyang damit na natapunan na ng

alak.

“Don’t worry about the Batangas incident. We’ll take care of it,” seryosong

sabi ni Kalix.

“Salamat,” tumango ako at napamasahe sa sentido ko.

Alam kong nahihirapan na naman si Elyse dahil sa ‘kin. Bumalik na naman sa

‘kin ‘yung guilt sa nangyari sa Mommy niya. Gusto kong humingi ulit ng patawad

sa kaniya. Siguro nga, hanggang ngayon, hindi ko pa pinapakawalan.. pero

kailangan.

Hindi naging madali sa ‘kin harapin ‘yung Daddy niya, ‘yung taong nambaboy sa

nanay ko. ‘Yung taong sumira sa lahat. Alam ko ring hindi madali para kay

Elyse kaya sinamahan ko siya. Hinarap namin ‘yon nang magkasama.

“Narito ulit ako, Sir,” umupo ako sa tabi ng Daddy niya. Nasa tabi niya si

Kuya Roel na nagbabantay at nag-aalaga sa kaniya.

Napatingin sa ‘kin ang Daddy ni Elyse at tinanggal ang oxygen mask niya.

Tumikhim ako at bumuntong-hininga.

“Papakasalan ko na siya bukas,” mahinang sabi ko. “Narito ako para gawin ‘to

nang tama. Alam kong hindi mo siya kayang mai-lakad sa altar at hindi mo

kayang tumayo rito kaya pinapaalam ko sa ‘yo.. Bukas. Ikakasal na kami bukas.”

“That’s good..” Naiyak siya sa sobrang tuwa. “I trust you, Engineer Camero..”

“Pinatawad ka na niya, pero hindi pa siya handa para makasama ka ulit. Sana

maintindihan mo ‘yon, Sir,” tumayo ako. “Salamat sa pagbibigay mo ng buhay sa

kaniya. Kahit papaano, naging parte ka pa rin ng pagkatao niya.”

“Take care of her,” he whispered.

“Kahit hindi mo hilingin, Sir, aalagaan ko siya,” binigyan ko siya ng ngiti.

“Mabuhay ka na sanang masaya at malaya. Maraming salamat.”

Iyon na ang huli kong sinabi bago umalis. Dumiretso ako sa puntod ng Mommy

niya para maglapag ulit ng bulaklak. Nilinis ko ang lapida at inalis ang mga

damong nakaharang doon bago umupo sa damuhan.

“Papakasalan ko na ho ang anak n’yo bukas, Ma’am,” ngumiti ako sa sarili ko.

“At sana masaya ka.. Sana masaya ka para sa amin.”

Matagal kong tinitigan ang pangalan niya sa lapida, sinusubukang alisin ang

masasamang alaala sa utak ko. Mas gusto ko na lang alalahanin ‘yung mga

panahong naroon pa siya. Kung paano niya ‘ko tinanggap para sa anak niya.

“Napatawad ko na ho ang sarili ko,” bulong ko. “Salamat sa lahat ng ginawa

n’yo para kay Elyse. Sa lahat ng sinakripisyo n’yo para sa kaniya, at salamat

dahil lumaki siyang matatag. Alam kong manonood ka ho bukas. Huwag kayong mag-

alala. Lahat gagawin ko para pasayahin siya.”

Nilabas ko ang papel na nasa bulsa ko. “Sinulat ko ho ang wedding vow ko para

sa kaniya. Dapat pati ‘yung sa akin marinig n’yo rin, ‘no?”

Huminga ako nang malalim bago ko sinimulan.

“Elyse, hindi ko na kailangan i-kwento kung paano tayo nagkakilala dahil halos

lahat sila, alam na nila ‘yon,” pagbabasa ko. “Sasabihin ko na lang ‘yung una

kong naramdaman noong nakita kita..”

Sa isang kurap ko, nasa harapan ko na siya. Ang babaeng pinakamamahal ko.

Hinawakan ko ang kamay niya habang lahat ng tao ay nakatingin sa amin,

nanonood, at naghihintay ng susunod na sasabihin ko.

“Hindi kita nagustuhan, e,” tumawa ako habang hawak ang microphone. Tumawa rin

sila Arkin. “Sabi ko.. Ah, ang bata tapos mukhang maarte.”

Sinamaan ako ng tingin ni Elyse pero pinagpatuloy ko pa rin ang sinasabi ko.

“Pero nakita ko kung gaano kabuti ‘yung puso mo. Nakita ko kung gaano ka ka-

handa i-sakripisyo ang lahat para sa kasiyahan ko at sa kasiyahan mo. Limang

taon din ‘yun, Eli.. Limang taon. Halos lahat na ng paghihirap, naranasan na

natin. Mula sa basketball, cheerdance competition, sa pag-aaral, sa pag-

graduate, pag-take ng boards, sa pag-kuha ng trabaho, sa mismong pagtatrabaho,

sa pag-kuha ng unang condo at sa pagpili ng mga gamit. We grew together.. and

then grew apart..”

Tumingin ako sa mga mata niya at nakita na ang nagbabadyang luha roon. Ngumiti

ako sa kaniya kahit nanginginig na rin ang mga kamay ko.

“Pero ‘yung panahong magkahiwalay tayo, ‘yun ‘yung nagpatatag sa ‘tin,”

hinawakan ko nang mahigpit ang kamay niya. “I want to thank you for being with

me. Salamat sa pag-titiis mo sa corny kong mga banat, sa paglalaro ko ng kung

ano-ano sa computer, at sa silent treatment ko sa ‘yo tuwing galit ako.”

Tumango siya at kinagat ang labi, tumutulo na ang luha. Huminto ako saglit

para huminga nang malalim dahil nagbabadya na rin ang luha sa mga mata ko.

“Ngayong araw, tatanggapin kita nang buong buo. Tinatanggap kita bilang ikaw.

I take you with all your faults, your insecurities, your attitude, your

weakness and strength. I promise to always choose you and love you every

passing day. Sa pag-gising, sa pag-tulog, ikaw ang pipiliin ko at mamahalin

ko. I promise to be with you when you think that everything is falling apart.

I promise that I will try every day, to present my best to you.”

Tumulo na ang luha ko kaya sinubukan kong punasan ‘yon gamit ang likod ng

kamay ko. Tumawa saglit si Elyse at yumuko para hindi ako makitang umiiyak

dahil mas naiiyak lang siya.

“I promise that I will share everything to you. Kahit pagkain ko pa,” I

chuckled. “I promise that I will never make you feel that you are alone in

every battle that you will face. I promise to be your strength, your

motivation to keep moving forward, and your inspiration to be better every

day. Lahat ng kalungkutan mo, sasaluhin ko. Lahat ng kasiyahan ko at kasiyahan

mo, ibabahagi natin sa isa’t isa. I promise that I will always be here to

support you.”

Nanginginig na ang boses ko. Pinunasan ko ulit ang luha ko bago magpatuloy.

Nakita kong umiiyak si Mama, sila Luna, si Ida. Tinanguan ako ni Arkin para

sabihin sa ‘king kaya ko ‘to.

Â “Pinapangako kong hindi ako aalis sa tabi mo kahit gaano kahirap o kahit

gaano nakakapagod.. Kasi mahal kita,” napakagat ako sa labi ko at huminga nang

malalim. “At lahat kakayanin ko kapag nandiyan ka. I promise to make you

proud..”

“I’m already so proud of you,” bulong ni Elyse, umiiyak.

“I, Sebastian Vincent Camero, take you, Amora Elyse Ledezma, to be my lawfully

wedded wife.. To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for

worse, for richer, for poorer, for sickness and in health, to love and to

cherish, ‘til death do us part.. and this is my solemn vow.”

Mahigpit ang hawak ko sa kamay niya. Nakatitig lang ako sa kaniya hanggang sa

dulo ng ceremony. Hinawakan ko ang mukha niya at hinalikan siya sa harap ng

lahat. Ngumiti siya sa ‘kin at niyakap ang leeg ko.

“I love you,” bulong niya sa ‘kin.

“Mahal kita, at mamahalin kita sa bawat araw na lumipas,” hinalikan ko siya sa

noo.

Lahat ng pangarap namin, tutuparin namin nang magkasama. Mula sa unang taon,

sa unang bahay, sa unang anak, sa lahat ng una, mananatili ako. Hindi ko siya

iiwan.. because a life without her, is a life that I can never live.

Kaya mananatili ako.. Kahit gaano katagal, kahit gaano kahirap, dahil siya

lang ang taong gugustuhin kong makita sa bawat tapos ng laro, ng trabaho, ng

araw.

Siya ang pahinga ko.

Sebastian Vincent Camero

#2.

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